

**CFF Candidate Questionnaire
Mayor and City Council Candidates
November 2019 Election
(2 year Term)**

Name: Laura Mikulski

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Please provide responses to the following prompts:

- **Describe your community involvement.**
 - My community involvement is extensive. I founded Ferndale Rat Patrol in 2016, a grassroots organization of residents dedicated to sanitation and proactive prevention and elimination of rats in Ferndale through non-poison means. Since inception we have helped over 1k people in Ferndale alone, and have expanded our reach and assistance to neighboring communities like Royal Oak, Hazel Park, Berkley, Taylor, Warren, and more. I have personally assisted over 500 homeowners in Ferndale with their rat problems, coming to their home to help install preventative barriers, teach them skills on elimination, and even help them with sanitation issues. I've lead sanitation mitigation efforts around dumpsters and rat burrows throughout our downtown on multiple occasions. Our group was awarded a Good Neighbors award in 2018 for our outreach and service.
 - I've served on the Ferndale Beautification Commission since 2015, with a special focus on sustainable design and eco-friendly practices.
 - I'm a member of the Ferndale Garden Club, and have lectured twice to members on topics of soil building and pest prevention.
 - I run Ferndale Backyard Chickens, a website and social presence that acts as a repository for information regarding our backyard chicken ordinance and keeping hens within city limits. This has become the go-to resource for cities and townships across Michigan to understand issues around backyard chickens and municipal code allowing them. Ferndale has become the model upon which other cities base their codes, and I'm proud to represent Ferndale at consideration meetings in other cities across metro Detroit and beyond.
 - I'm a 4 year member and volunteer with The Elks Ferndale Lodge #1588, a charitable & fraternal organization. This Fraternal Order was founded "To promote and practice the four cardinal virtues of Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love and Fidelity; to promote the welfare and enhance the happiness of its members; to quicken the spirit of American Patriotism and cultivate good fellowship." I firmly believe in the spirit of the organization, and the work that the Elks does through the Drug Awareness Program, the Elks National Foundation, and the Patriot Heroes Program.
 - I co-founded and ran the Ferndale Farmers Market in 2011, serving as a small, local source for fresh food.
- **Why did you decide to run for City Council/Mayor? What has prepared you to hold a City Council/Mayor seat?**
 - I decided to run for city council to further help the residents I've talked to over the years, and hopefully to serve them at a higher level. I believe in service as a function of local government, and I know that there are a number of residents who feel like the focus of council has shifted from away from listening. I'd like to leverage my years of outreach and interaction among residents, as well as my professional background in accounting and finance, to steer our community in a way that moderates our growth to stay in-line with the values we hold dear. My goal, as always, is to help where I can, when I can.

- **What is the most productive relationship between Council and the City Manager?**
 - I believe that the most effective working relationships are built on 4 concepts: Trust, teamwork, communication and respect. As such, the most productive relationship is a collaborative. City Council is the policy making group for the City; the City Manager is the executor of those policies. Council advises the City Manager on resident concerns and issues they identify, while the City Manager brings information on city projects and issues to the Council so that they can make informed decisions. I believe by following the 4 central concepts identified above, while holding the City Manager and staff under him accountable, we would have the most productive working relationship and accomplish the most during Council & commission meetings.
- **When there is disagreement on any issue among members of the City Council what is the responsibility of each individual Council member?**
 - I believe each council member has a responsibility to civil discourse while keeping an open mind. Common ground should be sought in all cases where it makes sense, and an atmosphere of respect cultivated. However, as an elected representative, council members should strive to remember and serve their constituents and the values that they hold; if that means that they need to disagree, then they should strive to do so respectfully.
- **What role do Boards and Commissions play in Ferndale's Government? How should members be recruited/screened?**
 - Boards and commissions are an integral part of local government and a fantastic way for local governments to engage citizens in the democratic process. Their primary purpose is to provide guidance and advice from the perspective of residents, and take part in crucial studies of pending issues, survey other residents, research & review, and make recommendations to council and staff. I believe that members should be recruited with care, always seeking to maintain an inclusive environment and sample population that is in-line with city demographics, while avoiding cronyism or bias that could be the result of engaging with select community members due to past associations.
- **How will you work to promote inclusion of populations that might feel excluded in this community?**
 - Outreach, outreach, outreach. We live in a time where we have the absolute most tools to easily and quickly perform outreach to residents, and we should take full advantage of that. Our text messaging system is under-utilized as an outreach and engagement tool; our high-touch connection to residents is limited to council meetings and commissions- events that are intimidating to many residents. Residents often want nothing more than to be heard, understood, and acknowledged as important- we owe it to them to ensure that they know, always, that we want their voice to be heard.
- **Describe the type of development that you see as most beneficial to Ferndale.**
 - I see moderated growth as most beneficial to Ferndale- we should focus on preservation of community & greenspace, sustainability efforts with clear ROI and benefit to the city, and affordable and inclusive housing initiatives. We clearly do not have a problem attracting development to the city. At this point in our growth trajectory I feel we have a responsibility to moderate the growth within the city to reduce our risk of losing what makes Ferndale so special and unique.
- **What specific ideas do you have for reducing expenditures while maintaining city services?**
 - One cardinal rule: Look for how to do better rather than simply how to cut. Cuts are easy to find -- but they don't necessarily save money. Procurement functions are always good places to look for improvements to save money (remember Rule No.1: improve performance, savings will follow); utility costs like energy and telecommunications also tend to be neither well-monitored nor cheap.
 - I would take a hard look at our 3rd party vendor services within every department, and see if the value we find in using third party vendors is something that can instead be sourced

in-house. We have been cultivating talent within our employee pool for years, and our diverse, multi-talented population that can serve on advisory boards & commissions to do assessment, research and more. The past few years have seen a growing reliance on advisory & research services supplied by 3rd party vendors, often with price tags 50k and up. Utilizing in-house talent and advisory boards may be able to help mitigate this cost.

- **Describe one program you would champion to help foster community.**

- I'd like to spearhead a regular community connection event: low tech, high-touch activities like small group conversations or methods like storytelling can help people share community experiences in their own words without being intimidated by speaking to a room full of people (such as at council and commission meetings). High tech tools can play a role too; tools like mms polling and social media live events enable people to express their opinion anonymously or remotely on issues, easing their fear of being confronted or judged for their perspective and engaging with them in a way that's convenient for their schedule.

- **Where do you see Ferndale in five years?**

- I see Ferndale thriving and continuing to grow over the next 5 years. I think with the right strategy in place, we'll continue to progress and be noteworthy as an inclusive, dynamic city.
- I see the demographics of Ferndale changing. Currently, with median house prices and rental prices creeping steadily upward, I fear that we'll lose our ability to attract people of moderate to low income. Our senior population is at risk of losing their ability to 'age in place' as taxes rise, and as they sell their homes many investors will likely try to purchase them for flips (with high price tags) or rentals (with equally high price tags). We need a strong strategy to ensure that our high tax rate and attractive environment for investors doesn't leave us in a place where housing options are only affordable to those of upper-middle income and above.