



**Colorado People's Action (CPA)  
Endorsement Questionnaire  
Aurora City Council 2019**

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

My name is Omar Montgomery and I am running for Mayor of Aurora, Colorado.

a. Why did you decide to run for office and what will your top 3 priorities be if elected to council?

I decided to run for office because I have long been involved in community in Aurora, including my work with young people, the faith based community, immigrant/refugee communities - and I want to continue to work with communities so that all people who live and work in Aurora has fair opportunities for success. I have spent the last ten years in Aurora working on city boards, in non-profit leadership, and advocating for Aurorans on both local and national issues.

My top three priorities for Aurora are:

1. Housing access - Rising living costs and flat wages have made it difficult for many in Aurora to stay in place or purchase their first home. Most Aurorans paid more than 30% of their annual income on rent in 2015, and our homeownership rates are below the national average. As mayor, I will work with city hall, developers, and our state government to create new housing opportunities, expand services which help low and fixed income-earners keep their homes, and balance the market forces which have made affordable living a challenge.
2. Economic development for all communities - I have dedicated much of my own community work to supporting Aurora's economic development through supporting our small businesses. I believe entrepreneurship within our diverse communities is part of Aurora's identity. I make it a priority to meet with Aurora small business owners every week - to learn from them what they need to thrive in Aurora. I have been on the Entrepreneurship Program Advisory Board for the Community College of Aurora, where I have provided input and help to young people seeking to become entrepreneurs.
3. Supporting our young people - Aurora is home to 38,000 students, from more than 130 countries, speaking more than 160 languages. 70.4% of our students qualify for and receive subsidized lunch. We need to do everything we can to ensure every child's potential is reached. As mayor, I will work with our public schools, colleges, and businesses to explore anti-bullying programs, encourage cultural exchange, improve food stability for low-income families, and expand our dual enrollment, apprenticeship, and after school programs. I believe providing our youth positive opportunities will help our whole community, from supporting economic development of our own community to improving public safety.

2. The US ranks as a country with one of the highest rates of incarceration in the world and the poorest, most marginalized and people of color disproportionately represent jail and prison populations. What would you do to push the city to address systemic racial bias within the criminal justice system?

In terms of the bigger picture, as Mayor I will first look to the roots of systematic oppression for low income communities and support policies to change them. This includes the city leading by example as an employer - including providing benefits families need and salaries that enable them to thrive in Aurora. I will work with other employers to do the same. I will work on policies to make housing more affordable in Aurora. I will support our school districts and after school programs, so that all youth have the tools and opportunities to thrive as they grow into adulthood.

Mass incarceration in our country disproportionately impacts people of color. We need to dismantle policies that continue these outcomes, including biased laws. We need to implement training for law enforcement and community policing strategies where there is a reciprocal relationship between law enforcement and all communities they serve.

I believe solving these complex problems will require a multi-disciplinary approach and a commitment to using policy tools. I have gained experience and expertise on these issues for Aurora as an appointee and representative for the community. This has included participating in task forces with our schools and District Attorney's Office, as well as a part of the community policing advisory committee for Aurora's Police Department. As Mayor I will collaborate with our neighborhoods, health departments, and law enforcement to create a public safety program that works for everybody.

My community experience includes:

- Blueprint APS "What-If?" Task Force, Aurora Public Schools
- Community Policing Advisory Team, For Aurora Police Department & Chief Nick Metz
- Youth Diversion Equity Task Force, District Attorney, Arapahoe County
- Minority Underrepresentation Committee, District Attorney, Judicial District 18

3. Aurora is the most diverse city in the entire state, with a large number of immigrants within our community.
  - a. What is your opinion about the humanitarian crisis happening inside the GEO Immigration Detention Facility and what actions will you take, if any?

I am disturbed by the policies of the Federal government resulting in large numbers of immigrants being detained. I am even more concerned with the privatization of the agencies carrying out these policies - and the incentives such a system creates. I would like to see and will advocate against federal policies criminalizing those seeking asylum. I would like the GEO facility to be used for other needs, such as a recreation center or providing pro-active services to help immigrants and refugees. I am also deeply disturbed the message being sent by having this facility in our city and will partner with federal, state and local leaders to stop this treatment of immigrants.

- b. Yes or No - Do you support closing all private prisons?

Yes. I believe there is not enough oversight or legal protections in such facilities

- c. Will you work to move Aurora to become a “Sanctuary City” and establish a Legal Defense Fund? Why and explain your definition of “sanctuary city”

Yes, I do not want city resources used to punish our immigrant and refugee communities. I would support the creation of a legal defense fund managed by a non-profit organization.

4. Would you drop citizenship requirements for all boards and commissions? Why?

Yes. I believe our immigrant community are an important voice in Aurora. It is Aurora’s diversity that is our uniqueness. I want their input in our city’s governance.

5. We’re seeing localities across country moving toward 100% renewable energy. Do you support transitioning Aurora to a 100% renewable energy economy? If so, by when? How will you ensure that communities of color, low-income communities, workers and transit dependent community members are not left behind?

I support our city moving towards using 100% renewable energy and supporting our residents and businesses doing so as well. I will work with the city council on opportunities to move us towards this goal as soon as possible. I also do not believe we have to decide between strong environmental policies and jobs. I would work with our labor community to create a plan that includes their input and opportunities for their workers to continue to work and thrive in Aurora.

Environmental justice is also important to me. I know low income communities and communities of color are the most impacted by industry in our state and city. I have and will always be a voice for protecting their health and safety. My leadership will include community input in every decision, and I will also proactively seek it out. I will implement strategies to go residents’ homes, reach out to them through snail mail and phone calls, and schedule community meetings at times they can attend. I will work hard to increase community input to ensure all voices are being heard in the decisions being made in our city.

6. The oil and gas industry in Colorado is edging closer and closer to residential districts, do you have a plan to protect Aurora residents from health and environmental hazards associated with their operations? Do you support a full ban on fracking?

I am very concerned with the impacts of oil and gas development and operations in our state, which includes counties in Aurora. I support strong local control of these operations and support the state legislature in their work to allow more of it. I have concerns about the safety in oil and gas operations, as well as the employee’s voices and concerns being heard. I will prioritize health and safety in my work with the city and council to oversee all oil and gas operations in Aurora. I oppose oil and gas operations being developed near residential communities and will make that a priority in all development planning and projects in Aurora.

Overall, I support moving away from all use of oil and gas and dependence on it. I support policies moving us away from the industry’s dominance and will work with state and local leaders to move us away from our reliance on it to use of clean energy options, and work to make Aurora government a leader in developing and use of clean energy. I believe we can transition to green jobs and clean energy in a smart and considerate way that provides opportunities for businesses, entrepreneurs, and communities impacted.

I also am committed to addressing climate change on a regional issue. I will work with our neighboring cities next to Aurora to have us mutually develop strategic deliverables to reduce pollution, improve our air quality and conserve our water.

7. Where do you stand on workers ability to collectively bargain, and would you support a resolution for the workers in the city of Aurora to do so?

I strongly support collective bargaining and unions. I will support a resolution supporting it, as well as support the city contracting with employers who have employees who are in unions. I will also work with labor leaders to protect the legal rights of employees in any way I can in our city.

8. Aurora now has the power to increase its wages, will you support and fight for Aurora to increase its minimum wage at a higher level than that of the state? What amount do you think that should be?

I support a living wage for employees. I support moving to \$15 an hour right now for minimum wage in Aurora, as well as working to increase it beyond that. I know all too well the costs of housing in Aurora have risen and working families are struggling. In fact, many families are moving to Aurora because we are slightly more affordable. I know Aurora families need living wages, need health care and family leave benefits, and need more affordable housing. We do this with living wages.

9. We are facing an affordability crisis and many in our community specifically communities of color and low-income folks are being pushed out. What will you do to address affordability issues?

As mentioned above I am very concerned about housing affordability in Aurora. My own mother saw her rent rise by a third this year, threatening her independence. I have several ideas for addressing affordability. First, I will work with the city council and planning department to support more affordable using options being developed and zoned throughout our city. I strongly believe mixing housing types strengthens economic stability overall. Also, in city planning I will support balancing housing and business development to ensure Aurora's tax base can help support affordable housing projects. While affordable rentals are important, I am committed to looking at more sustainable options through homeownership. I would like to also address affordability through increasing Community Land Trust programs, senior cooperatives, townhomes, condominiums and manufactured homes that are at a more accessible price point for low income folks. Finally, preventing displacement and in the cases when it happens, working to ensure financial compensation for those folks who are at risk for being pushed out.

10. If elected, what is your plan for working with community and your vision for changing politics as usual?

I am running for Mayor of Aurora because of my love for my community. I have worked with our youth, our immigrant communities, our diverse communities, for an Aurora for all of us. When elected, I will be the first African American mayor of Aurora, the most diverse city in Colorado. I have and will work with our communities to get their input and I will put their needs first. I believe Aurora's diversity, our hard-working residents, our entrepreneurs, make us the best city in Colorado. My vision is one of a leadership that listens and includes all communities and empowers them to thrive.

11. Will you commit to meeting with COPA quarterly?

Yes, I would and I would use your input in guiding my own policy agenda.

12. Aurora occupies three counties, what is your plan to reconcile them and advance community-centered policy across Aurora as a whole?

I have worked across counties and will do so as Mayor. I know we have lessons from each county on how we can plan and serve our city. For example, Adams County has many lessons to provide from the oil and gas development. All of our counties have major barriers to transportation for our residents. I will work with the RTD board, but also with county leaders, to advocate for RTD to best serve our city's full needs. I have a history of being a convener of communities, and will be the Mayor that convenes our county leadership and communities to strengthen our city for all residents.

13. What are your thoughts on accountability, are you open to be held accountable by groups and community and are you willing to hold others accountable to a vision for a better Aurora?

As mayor, I will be accessible and accountable. I strongly believe in accountability, which is one of the reasons I sit on several task forces and boards ensuring it. My experience being a community advocate for communities of color, I recognize the issues of when leaders make promises, but don't deliver. If I commit to moving a policy forward that I work on with COPA through the co-governance process, I will follow through. The regular communication of quarterly meetings will enable us to track progress on achieving that vision for a better Aurora. I look forward to working closely to make that happen.