

Gretchen Rydin
Candidate – At Large
Littleton Business Chamber Candidate Forum 2021

1) What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses of the downtown Littleton area? Give us three positive and three negative responses with a short explanation.

Strengths:

1. **Walkable** - The downtown is extremely walkable, especially for the many residents in the surrounding area.
2. **Historic** - The downtown is historic, with buildings and other structures spanning more than 100 years; a cultural gem.
3. **Unique shops** - Our shops are funky cool places to gather with friends and that attract tourists.

Weaknesses:

1. **Lack of parking** - People who do not live nearby have to drive to access it, leading to crowded side streets.
2. **Increase in the homeless** - Community members and businesses are often intimidated by their presence and avoid them, resulting in lost business.
3. **Restrictions on choice** - I've heard several business leaders express their frustrations with the many requirements the city demands for various changes to building structures, which is not enforced equally and simply is not fair.

2) What is your priority for development in the city and why?

- a) **New residential homes**
- b) **New commercial business**
- c) **Revitalizing and utilizing current spaces**

New residential homes: I will prioritize development that provides for the growing population of retirees looking to downsize, which then frees up their single family homes for occupation by young families.

New commercial business: I will work with the business chambers and the city's economic development staff to bring new local businesses to Littleton. I support innovative business solutions like Weekends on Main and pilot programs like the Birds.

Revitalizing and utilizing current spaces: According to the 2020 Littleton Business Survey, 50% of businesses reported that workforce housing is an issue for their employees. I will work to protect low- and middle-income rental properties and find innovative solutions to utilize current space to address workforce housing.

3) The Littleton Business Chamber (LBC) advocated for a \$.50 tax increase to be placed on the ballot in November, City Council voted for a \$.75. increase. LBC has requested that the City Council sunset the \$.75 tax increase down to \$.50, after the city has met its capital improvement requirements. Are you for or against sunsetting \$.25 of the tax increase? Explain why or why not.

I support sunsetting \$0.25 of the tax increase. The current \$0.75 increase on the ballot will help the city access American Rescue Plan Act funds from the federal government which often require a minimum of a 20% match for a project. Sunsetting is a great compromise for our city's financial situation, in which we may use the initial surplus to take advantage of federal funds to pay for our infrastructure, then, once the \$0.75 tax increase has served its purpose, the sunset may reduce the burden on our consumers and businesses.

4) Other than the proposed sales tax increase, what three steps would you take to get the City in a more stable financial position?

I will advocate for the city to access federal matching funds to invest in maintaining our infrastructure. I also support modernizing the capital projects fund, which means relying on other sources of revenue besides the gas tax and building use tax. In terms of the downtown, I support a Downtown Development Association (DDA), which will give downtown businesses their own revenue stream and financial autonomy.

5) Why do you feel you are the best choice for City Council? Why should someone vote for you?

As the child of grandparents who ran their own small business--and of a father who tried several businesses and could not make any of them work--I know the stress facing our small businesses entrepreneurs. And as a therapist and social worker, I know how to listen and advocate. This is what we need in our city council members—someone who gets it, someone who will listen, and someone who will advocate for them to get things done. Additionally, my background in crisis management and my service on the board of an interfaith organization provides the skills to work with people of different core beliefs and to handle tension-filled situations. These abilities, and my commitment to good governance, will allow me to build strong relationships with other council members, city officials, and regional partners to keep Littleton the best city to live, work, study, retire, and enjoy the outdoors.

6) What is your plan to involve businesses outside the “football” in your decision-making process?

Meet with the South Park Owners Association regularly, as well as the Littleton Business Chamber. Talk to other business owners throughout Littleton and see what is on their mind and how the city can make life just a little bit easier for them. Discussions to revitalize Littleton Blvd will also present opportunities for business owner engagement beyond the downtown.

7) How do you plan to get input regarding business in Littleton other than through City staff?

Read the yearly Business Surveys and the local paper. Attend the Historic Littleton Merchants Association, Littleton Business Chamber, and South Park Owners Association meetings and consult with business leaders regularly—formally and informally. I met a woman while I was out knocking on doors who recently lost her business--Romancing the Bean, the coffee shop at the light rail station. They lost \$25,000 because of COVID and are still paying off bills (I got their permission to share this). These stories are real and city council members need to have their ear to the ground to make sure every voice is heard. It's also important to spend time downtown in our shops and use our business services—shopping, eating, getting a massage, taking a pilates class.

8) What would be your plan to handle the increasing issue with the homeless disrupting businesses and how would you expect the police department to handle these problems?

The solution must be collaborative, with buy-in from the unhoused, businesses, social service agencies, and the police. I support recommendations from the Tri-Cities Homelessness Policy Committee, which includes funding a staff coordinator position and a Navigation Center (possibly paid for by the County or American Rescue Plan Act funds) to provide resources and support. I also support the use of mental health professionals who respond with police on crisis calls when there is a mental health issue. We know that the involvement of a mental health professional can defuse situations that can otherwise be dangerous for citizens and police officers alike.