

Overland Park City Council 2021

Response ID:28 Data

1. Candidate Information

1. Candidate Name

Melissa Cheatham

2. Address

Street Address/Apt/Suite : PO Box 11671

City/State/Zip : Overland Park, KS 66207

3. Phone Number

PO Box 11671

4. Email Address

melissa@melissaop.com

5. Campaign Website

www.melissaop.com

2. Candidate Background

6. Occupation/Work History (last 5 years - 25 words or less)

Mother, consultant, community volunteer and advocate, former congressional staff.

7. Please list political, community and business organizations with whom you have been affiliated and any leadership positions you have held.

Empire Estates Homes Association, Secretary

Trailwood Elementary PTA, Legislative Chair

Climate Action KC, Policy Committee Member

Overland Park Environmental Advisory Council, Secretary

Wonderscope Children's Museum of Kansas City, Board Member

KC Scholars, Reviewer

3. Issues and Policy

8. List your top three policy issues? (100 words or less)

Keep the City Working. Overland Park is ranked a top place to live and raise a family because things work well here. My top priority is to continue this excellence for our residents, who deserve reliable, high-quality municipal services.

Build for the future. Our city has set goals to be welcoming, forward-thinking, and innovative. These should be our criteria for encouraging growth.

Invest in environmentally and fiscally sustainable options. Climate solutions such as better buildings, active transportation infrastructure, tree planting and stormwater design also make us healthier, improve our fiscal position, and improve our quality of life.

9. What are your views on the services and value the City's citizens receive for their local tax dollars? (100 words or less)

Overland Park residents receive tremendous value for our tax dollars. We have the lowest property tax rate in the county and the city employs fewer staff per capita than most other large cities in the county. Our highly efficient city nonetheless provides excellent amenities like our parks, trails, attractions and I have always found city staff extremely responsive to my needs as a resident. We are getting a bargain here in Overland Park and my top priority as a council member will be to continue this high level of service and keep the city working well.

10. Regarding the City's budget, a 1-mill property tax increase to fund the recommendations of the Mental Health Task Force has been proposed for 2022. Do you support the task for recommendations? Do you support increasing the mill levy for this purpose? Discuss why/why not and how you would fund the recommendations if you support them but not the mill levy increase. (100 words or less)

Yes, I support the mental health task force recommendations and the funding to implement them. Our community values wellness and we are willing to invest to keep our family and friends safe and healthy.

11. What changes, if any, would you like to see in the City's proposed budget for 2022?

Overall, I think the proposed budget reflects our community's evolving priorities. We operate efficiently, employing among the fewest staff per capita in the county. This budget begins to fill gaps, including new hires for parks and forestry and \$1.6 million to create the new behavioral health police unit, which I support. In addition, it proposes a \$1.8 million expansion of the police department, in response to a staffing study. Since many departments are likely understaffed, I would prefer to see a full staffing analysis and community conversation about priorities before making such a large investment in one department.

12. What role, if any, do you believe the City should play in economic development to bring jobs and capital investment to the community? (100 words or less)

Overland Park is one of the best places in the country to live, work and play. People and employers want to be here. I believe the city has an important job to do in trumpeting our successes and the benefits of investing in Overland Park. In addition, I do support judicious use of public-private partnerships to encourage the highest quality projects that advance community goals, catalyze additional unsubsidized growth, and provide clear community benefits. It would be a mistake to unilaterally disarm in the fight for jobs and investment, but I will insist on holding all projects to high standards.

13. As the City considers future development and redevelopment projects, describe your views on how the City should best manage and balance growth? (100 words or less)

Overland Park should prioritize sustainable growth, looking beyond short-term gains to long-term implications of development. Redevelopment that utilizes existing infrastructure is the most fiscally and environmentally prudent choice. Development should generate sufficient value to pay for itself.

14. What do you believe are the greatest challenges the City faces over the next ten years and how would you address them? (100 words or less)

Toxic politics across the ideological spectrum seeks to divide us and stands in the way of common sense problem-solving on behalf of the public. Overland Park's success has been built on cooperation and balance and we must prioritize those goals to remain vibrant.

15. Do you believe the current city manager form of government we have is appropriate for Overland Park or would you favor a "strong mayor" form of government? (100 words or less)

Our current form of government is serving us well. Resident satisfaction is high, we are growing, and we are ranked among the top places to live and raise a family in the country because of the work of our apolitical, professional staff.

16. It is estimated that replacing chip seal road resurfacing with a method similar to surrounding cities will cost more than \$20 million per year. Do you favor eliminating the chip seal process, and if so, how would you pay for the increased cost?

(100 words or less)

No one loves chip seal. It is a lower quality product but one the city has chosen because alternatives are more expensive. We need a community conversation about our priorities when it comes to taxes and investments. In addition to chip seal, our community is asking for better mental health services, gathering places, street trees, bike lanes, better sidewalks, updated parks, more climate resilience, and more community outreach. I would personally rank chip seal low on my priority list, but as an elected official, it would be my job to gauge and consider the priorities of the entire community.

17. What specific proposals do you have to support the goal of providing access to affordable housing throughout the City? (100 words or less)

My husband and I chose Overland Park to raise our family in part because it offered affordable housing for our middle class family. I support a holistic approach to affordability. I was pleased to participate in the Housing For All Task Force that evaluated dozens of solutions, many of which I believe could be successful here. These include: changes in zoning to allow more "missing middle" housing; prioritizing incentives to encourage attainable home prices; a community housing development organization; and energy efficient building codes. I also support investments that lower the cost of living by making car-free travel practical.

18. Since its founding in 1960, Overland Park leaders have had a long history of visionary planning. What do you believe the City should do today to ensure the City's prosperity for the next 60-years? (100 words or less)

Our visioning and planning work will be most successful if it includes a diverse group of residents, businesses and other stakeholders. I celebrate diversity as making life more interesting and making organizations more successful. I have actively encouraged and invited individuals with diverse life experiences to run for office and to join city boards and commissions and would encourage my fellow city leaders to join me in mentoring and encouraging new generations of diverse leaders.

19. Do you believe the City of Overland Park is headed in the right direction?

We are one of the top cities in the country in which to live and raise a family. We are facing new challenges, but I believe that we will continue on this path of excellence with leaders who continue to find solutions through collaboration and cooperation with residents' best interests in mind. We cannot grow complacent and must continue striving for improvement year after year.

20. Do you believe the City of Overland Park City Council is responsive to the needs of the community? What is your approach to governance?

My approach to governance will be to listen to all parties, learn and incorporate new information, and find ways to move forward to solve problems. In a diverse city containing a diversity of viewpoints, being responsive literally cannot mean voting the way everyone wants all of the time. However, I will strive to be responsive by prioritizing two-way community engagement, sharing information with my constituents, and committing to listen and learn from them.

21. Why are you seeking this public office?

I love living here and am committed to this place where I've chosen to raise my family. I want Overland Park to remain an attractive place to live so that my children choose to raise their families here, just like my husband did after growing up in Overland Park. I want to expand opportunities and welcome new residents to continue building an ever-more enduring and vibrant community. I feel called to serve because I know I can be an effective advocate for my neighbors.

22. What do you believe makes you uniquely qualified to serve in this position and most distinguishes you from your opponent(s) in this race?

I'm deeply committed to this place where I've chosen to raise my family. That commitment, paired with my experience making policy and solving problems at the local, city and federal level make me the leader Overland Park needs. I've already been tenacious in making change here, launching innovative programs and finding solutions in my neighborhood, my children's schools, through the city's Environmental Advisory Council, and through writing the Climate Action Playbook for our region.