Fort Collins Housing Access and Affordability Questionnaire:

Dear Fort Collins City Council/Mayoral candidate, the Associated Students of Colorado State University (ASCSU) would like to cordially invite you to express your perspectives on the current state of the City’s housing market, and the issue of rental affordability through the following questionnaire:

Median rental costs in Fort Collins have increased by about 65% since 2005, a significantly larger increase than portrayed in similar cities (per recent occupancy study conducted by Corona Insights). This increase in rental prices has perpetuated housing-insecurity throughout our community, caused some CSU students to experience homelessness, drove workers to reside at neighboring towns, and prevented individuals of low-income background from joining our community.

Do you view housing affordability as an issue in Fort Collins? (y/n/open answer)

Yes, housing affordability and attainability is one of the biggest challenges we are facing. We can improve both these areas by looking at current policies in a number of areas such as re-evaluating U+2, reducing restrictions on Accessory Dwelling Units, and allowing more housing choices. This is a challenge that will take a lot of small changes to have a real positive impact.

Does the current state of housing affordability in Fort Collins contribute to college unaffordability in your opinion? (y/n/open answer)

Yes, housing is a huge portion of expenses while attending school out of state or out of the region one grew up. I believe it costs too much all together and it feels like the lack of accessible housing is a driving factor. The cost of housing impacts students in two different ways; in the immediacy, it is the ability to afford school in the first place. Then, while in school, the ability to manage a workload sufficient enough to pay for
housing must weigh heavily on the decision to continue. In the long term, many students are having to use student loans to pay for housing and that increases the post-collegial debt load. Fort Collins should continue to work with CSU to open up options for students of all income levels to find a place to live.

Do you believe the occupancy ordinance, also known as U+2, is a significant contributor to the sharp rise in rental prices over the past fourteen years? Would you support a marginal increase in permitted occupants per dwelling unit such as Me+3 for example? (y/n/open answer)

I support moving to Me+3, right-sized housing regulations or another easing of the ordinance in a way that we can completely phase U+2 out over time. I have served on the Occupancy Task Force with the city for the past year and have studied this for 3 years. The U+2 regulation has negatively impacted housing affordability by reducing the usable number of rooms. The U+2 ordinance has reduced supply, but Fort Collins has not seen a slow down in demand.

Over 50% of violators of U+2 are non-students. Do you agree that this issue, and the issue of neighborhood quality, are more than just a student concern? (y/n/open answer)

I do agree that this more than just a student concern. From our recent study, we have learned that U+2 is no longer just a student issue, over 50% of violators being non-college students and 25% with children. Additionally, nearly half of potential violations are in owner-occupied homes. It is clear that because of the lack of attainable housing, we are seeing more young professionals, working couples, and retirees needing to share homes in order to afford to live in Fort Collins.

The recent occupancy study concluded that U+2 had a negative impact on housing affordability. It also found that the local community believes the ordinance had a
positive effect on neighborhood quality. Do you believe housing affordability and neighborhood quality are mutually exclusive? (y/n/open answer)

I believe that there is not a direct relationship tried to U+2. The overall population growth has impacted the quality of the neighborhoods more negatively then U+2 directly. I want to work with the city staff and citizens to look at developing a balanced approach to utilize our housing stock and allow for more options for housing choices, without negatively impacting the current qualities of neighborhoods.

What ideas do you have to address housing affordability and neighborhood quality in Fort Collins? (Open answer)

1. Work with the city staff, the Housing Catalyst, and other interested affordable housing developers to develop a high-density project for one of the land bank properties. Encourage appropriate higher density allowance for these low-income projects where the city and developers can have more control via deed restrictions and HOA rules could help reduce the potential insurance liability. Along with the city self-insuring the project, this could save as much as $20,000 per unit The potential cost is currently not known since it will depend on any state or federal grants, costs for development and the size of the overall project.

2. I also want to work to reduce the regulations in order to allow for more housing options. More specifically: (1) Look to reduce the lot requirement from 10,000 sqft to 8,000 sqft to allow more Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to be built. (2) Promote density bonuses for affordable units in attached products like townhomes and condominiums, such as allowing 6 unit buildings in Low Mixed-Use Neighborhood zones if the developer holds the 2 additional units as affordable. (3) Promote and change zoning rules to allow for cottage style, small or tiny, and cluster homes. The cost impacts of these would be minimal but would include a possible increase in full-time employee allocated workload to handle an increase in building applications, training of inspectors for the new housing types, and possible reduction of revenue if
the city reduces the water costs associated with these smaller units.

3. For neighborhood quality, in particular, I want the city to help improve neighborly communication by hosting neighborhood night outs, BBQs, and other events to help neighbors get together. Over-regulation creates a neighborhood base on telling on each other, rather than communicating directly to solve issues. We should encourage being good, communicative neighbors and not regulate each other.