

IMPORTANT NOTICE: The City Council may consider applicant qualifications for the Council vacancy in executive sessions which are closed to the public, and then make the appointment in a public meeting. You have the right, however, to have your application considered in a public meeting by providing a written request to the City Clerk.

CITY OF FLAGSTAFF
APPLICATION TO SERVE ON THE CITY COUNCIL

RETURN TO: CITY CLERK VIA EMAIL AT STACY.SALTZBURG@FLAGSTAFFAZ.GOV

DEADLINE TO SUBMIT APPLICATION: MONDAY, OCTOBER 12 AT 5:00 P.M.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS INFORMATION IS PUBLIC INFORMATION
(personal identifying information will not be released)

DATE: 10/12/26

YOUR NAME: Aimee Backus

HOME ADDRESS: [REDACTED] ZIP: 86004

EMPLOYER: Sosta JOB TITLE: FOH Cafe Manager

E-MAIL: [REDACTED]

PHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] LENGTH OF RESIDENCY IN FLAGSTAFF: 17

Using additional pages, please answer the following questions in 250 words or less, per question:

1. What makes a good Councilmember?
2. What do you think is the biggest issue facing Flagstaff? Give specifics and ideas for addressing the issue.
3. What are your top three priorities for being a City Councilmember and why?
4. What method do you expect to use to make a decision when you believe that there is a segment of the Flagstaff population not being heard on a particular issue?
5. Please give an example of when you were in a position of responsibility and others disagreed with you on how an important matter should be handled. How did you help resolve the issue?
6. What is your leadership style, please provide an example of your style in use.
7. What is your understanding, awareness, and familiarity with the Flagstaff Zoning Code?
8. A key role of the Flagstaff City Council is to adopt the city's budget; how would you balance the seven key community priorities and the realities of the city's financial position with the Council's role of policy development?

I certify that I meet the statutory requirements of living within the corporate limits of the City of Flagstaff for at least one year, that I am over the age of 18 years, that I am a registered voter of the City of Flagstaff, ***and that I have read and understand the right to have my application considered in a public meeting by providing a written request to the City Clerk.***



Applicant Signature

Dear City Clerk Saltzburg and Members of the City Council,

I am writing to express my interest in serving as the appointed Councilmember for the remainder of Councilmember Anthony Garcia's term. I have been a resident of Flagstaff since 2009, am a registered voter in Coconino County, and have spent the better part of the last decade investing my professional and volunteer energy into the health, vitality, and character of this community.

Since 2009, I've watched this town grow, change, and face pressures that feel bigger than any one person can solve. I've also watched it remain a place where people look out for each other, and that's the Flagstaff I want to help protect.

I'm applying for this vacancy because I believe local government works best when it's built around the people who actually live here. Not the loudest voices, not the visitors passing through, not the interests with the most money, the workers, the families, the small business owners, the longtime residents, and the younger people trying to build a future here. Those are the people I've spent my career serving, and those are the people I'd keep in mind if given the chance to serve on Council.

My background isn't in politics. It's in coordination and problem-solving. At the Arizona Coalition for Military Families, I worked across six northern Arizona counties, connecting organizations that didn't always talk to each other and finding upstream solutions to problems that had been treated as symptoms for years. As Interim Executive Director of the While Foundation, I stepped into a transition and kept things steady. Most recently, I helped build a restaurant from the ground up, designing systems, training staff, and learning that the best solutions come from the people doing the work every day.

What I'd bring to Council is a willingness to listen first, ask hard questions second, and build systems that actually work for the people who depend on them. I don't have all the answers. But I know how to find them, by talking to the people experiencing the problem, being honest about trade-offs, and bringing people together around a shared goal.

This community has given me a lot. I'd like the chance to give something back. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Aimee Backus

CITY OF FLAGSTAFF:

APPLICATION TO SERVE ON THE CITY COUNCIL QUESTIONS

1. What makes a good Councilmember?

To me, a good Councilmember is like a good manager, your job is to build and maintain the systems that allow everyone else to do their work well. When staff are struggling, that usually means the system isn't working, not that the people are failing. I see Council the same way. When residents are frustrated about housing, or small businesses are drowning, my first question isn't "what's wrong with them?" It's "where is the system pinching?"

A good Councilmember walks through the whole process to find where the problem actually lives, and talks directly to the people experiencing it. They know best what's working and what's difficult. You should never assume you understand a problem better than the people living it. That means asking genuine questions, distinguishing between the actual problem and its symptoms, and being honest about what happens when an idea is implemented, who it helps and who it impacts most.

It also means creating real places for feedback from everyone, not just the loudest voices. And it means setting people up for success by trusting them to handle the work, as long as the system is conducive to it. When I helped build Sosta from the ground up, designing the flow of the various stations, writing training manuals, creating opening and closing lists, I learned that a system is never finished. It needs constant updates and improvements to keep getting better. That's how I'd approach this role, not as [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

2. What do you think is the biggest issue facing Flagstaff? Give specifics and ideas for addressing the issue.

I believe the biggest issue facing Flagstaff is that our economic development has drifted away from the people who actually live, work, and build their lives here.

The growth of short-term rentals is one signal of this. With over 990 registered STRs in a city where workers struggle to find housing, we are prioritizing visitor accommodation over local workforce housing. Places like Sedona, where their solution was workers getting designated parking lots to sleep in, are a warning of where this path leads.

Arizona law limits how we can regulate STRs, we cannot simply ban them or cap their numbers. But that doesn't mean we should ignore the impact they have. The more important question is, what kind of economic development actually supports the people who live here year-round? That means supporting small businesses and workers who enroll their kids in our

schools, drink our water, and hike our trails. It means bringing the 10-Year Housing Plan, the Climate Action Plan, and the Regional Plan 2045 together so they work as one strategy, not separate documents in silos. And it means treating workforce housing as economic infrastructure, not a separate issue.

This is an "all hands on deck" moment for Flagstaff. We cannot solve housing, water, or wildfire risk in isolation from one another. My priority is to make sure our economic development serves the people who are already invested in Flagstaff, not just the visitors passing through.

3. What are your top three priorities for being a City Councilmember and why?

First: Economic development that serves locals first. I've watched chain restaurants and big-box stores multiply since I moved here in 2009, a Jimmy John's less than a block from a local sub shop, Milton Avenue lined with fast food, three Goodwills in some of our largest retail spaces while local thrift shops struggle. These corporations extract from our town without investing in it. I want to prioritize small, locally owned businesses that house our workforce, pay taxes here, and build community wealth. And STRs are not small businesses, they house no workforce and drive up housing costs for the people who actually live here.

Second: Workforce housing as economic infrastructure. We need workers before we need tourists and second-home owners who don't work here. I know people born here who have been forced to leave because the cost of living is too high and economic opportunity is too limited. When teachers and healthcare workers need Habitat for Humanity to afford a home, the system is broken. Habitat should be for our most vulnerable, not for degreed professionals who should be able to afford the town they serve.

Third: Climate and water consciousness in every decision. Flagstaff is "one fire away" from a water crisis, 76% of our water infrastructure sits in forested areas at high wildfire risk. That means every decision we make about growth, development, and our economy has to be filtered through a climate and water lens. We cannot keep approving projects that don't account for the

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

4. What method do you expect to use to make a decision when you believe that there is a segment of the Flagstaff population not being heard on a particular issue?

When I believe a segment of Flagstaff isn't being heard, my first move is to go to them directly, not wait for them to come to a Council meeting.

I learned this at the Arizona Coalition for Military Families, where we used an upstream model: instead of reacting after problems hit crisis level, we asked what was causing the issue at the root. That meant going to where people already were, VFWs, volunteer fire departments, rural churches, and sometimes just a couple who drives neighbors to appointments because no

one else can. In rural areas far from city resources, those are the organizations that keep people connected. I would bring that same approach to Council, find the barriers that keep people from participating, and connect the people already doing the work.

There are so many people and organizations in Flagstaff doing great work, but too often they're working alone or no one knows about them. Part of my role would be connecting those efforts so they're more effective together. That means asking who is not in the room and why, then bringing what I learn back to the Council so the people affected by a decision have a real role in shaping it, not just a listening session that goes nowhere.

5. Please give an example of when you were in a position of responsibility and others disagreed with you on how an important matter should be handled. How did you help resolve the issue?

At the Arizona Coalition for Military Families, I worked with veterans in deeply rural areas like St. Johns and Vernon. When the VA pushed to expand telehealth access, their solution was straightforward, distribute iPads to veterans. But that approach had a fundamental flaw. These are communities where reliable internet barely exists, many providers offer speeds as low as 10 Mbps, and cell coverage is spotty at best. Giving someone a device without connectivity doesn't solve the problem.

I pushed back with the VA, not by just saying "this won't work," but by explaining the upstream issue, before telehealth can function, people need infrastructure. That meant working with Verizon to advocate for cell tower expansion in those areas. It wasn't a quick fix, and it required bringing together organizations that didn't normally talk to each other. But the disagreement wasn't personal, it was about the system. The VA was solving the symptom; we needed to address the root cause.

That experience shaped how I approach conflict, come with information, be pragmatic, and focus on the actual barrier, not the person. I don't need to "win" the argument. I need to help everyone see the real problem clearly enough to solve it together.

6. What is your leadership style, please provide an example of your style in use.

My leadership style is grounded in meeting people where they are and taking responsibility for the systems they work within. I learned this at the Arizona Coalition for Military Families, where my job was coordinating people and organizations across six northern Arizona counties, getting them to work together toward a common goal, even when they had different priorities or didn't normally talk to each other.

That work taught me that people will do the right thing when they're set up for success. So when something goes wrong, my first question isn't "who messed up?" It's "what in the system made this harder than it needed to be?" I carried that approach into restaurant management, where I trained staff clearly, trusted them to do their jobs, and treated them with respect.

I don't believe leadership is about being the loudest voice or having all the answers. It's about building up the people around you, genuinely caring about their success, and recognizing that we all play a part in how things function. When people feel trusted and supported, they show up better, for their coworkers, for the business, and for the community. That's the kind of leadership I'd bring to Council.

7. What is your understanding, awareness, and familiarity with the Flagstaff Zoning Code?

I'll be honest, I'm not a zoning expert. But I understand the basics, and I understand why it matters.

The Zoning Code is Title 10 of the City Code, and it's the tool that implements the Regional Plan, it governs what can be built where, how dense, how tall, how far back from the street, and how much parking is required . It shapes everything from whether a neighborhood can have a corner store to whether a developer can build apartments near a bus stop. It's also directly connected to the issues I care most about, housing affordability, climate goals, and whether small local businesses can afford to open and operate.

I know the City is currently in the middle of a major code update. The Land Availability & Suitability Study and the Code Analysis Project have been identifying barriers in the current code that make it harder to build the housing we need . There's also a voluntary incentive program that gives developers density bonuses if they include affordable units or meet sustainability standards like water conservation or transit proximity . And I know zoning has real constraints, like Arizona law limiting how we can regulate short-term rentals, or Proposition 207 limiting how much we can downzone property.

If appointed, my plan would be to sit down with planning staff, walk through the actual code, and ask questions until I understand it well enough to make informed decisions. I don't need to be the expert in the room. I [REDACTED]

8. A key role of the Flagstaff City Council is to adopt the city's budget; how would you balance the seven key community priorities and the realities of the city's financial position with the Council's role of policy development?

The budget is a values document. It shows what we actually prioritize, not just what we say we do. So I'd start by asking, "does our spending reflect the priorities we've set, or have we drifted?"

The seven community priorities, things like a livable community, environmental stewardship, and economic vitality, aren't separate issues. They're interconnected . Housing supports economic development. Water security underpins everything. Climate resilience affects our infrastructure and our most vulnerable residents. So when I look at the budget, I'm asking whether our investments are working together or fighting each other.

I know the financial picture is tight. The city has faced revenue declines from the flat income tax, and the FY 2026-27 budget includes a primary property tax increase offset by a secondary tax decrease . But limited resources don't mean we can't make strategic choices. They mean we have to be clear about what matters most.

My framework would be, fund the things that build long-term resilience and serve the people who live and work here. That means protecting core services, continuing to invest in the 10-Year Housing Plan and the Carbon Neutrality Plan, and being honest about what we can and can't afford. The city manager's recommended budget prioritizes public safety, road maintenance, and strategic investments in housing and climate action . That's a reasonable foundation. My job would be to make sure those investments stay connected to the people they're meant to serve, not just balanced on paper.

AIMEE BACKUS

COMMUNITY WORK

Pickin' in the Pines Music Festival
Hospitality - Since 2022

Flagstaff Corral of Westerners
Member since 2022

CERTIFICATIONS

Wilderness First Responder
Exp. March 2027 *(since 2015)*

TIPS Arizona Title IV / Manager Food Handlers
Exp. April 2027

EDUCATION

Northern Arizona University Bachelor of Science - Psychology/ Healthy Lifestyle Coaching

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Front of House Manager

Sosta Flagstaff | January 2026 - Current

- Assist in the prep and building of a new restaurant. Creating material for training for staff and creating systems for front of house staff in service and execution of the systems.
- Build relationships with vendors and maintain those relationships as the restaurant adjusts in its new growth
- Continue to build up the restaurant with updating processes and training to ensure we keep improving over time.

Front of House Manager

The Table at Junipine Resort, Oak Creek, AZ | May 2024 - December 2025

- Manage all restaurant managerial duties, including creating schedules and doing all ordering, hiring and training staff, and POS system updates
- Maintain relationships with locals, resort guests, as well as the property management board members who oversaw the resort.

Interim Executive Director

Whale Foundation | August 2023 - December 2023 *(during my time at Hatch)*

- Managed day-to-day operations and ensured the smooth functioning of the organization during a transitional period.
- Upheld organizational values and facilitated collaboration among team members

Communications Specialist

Hatch River Expeditions | May 2022 - April 2024

- Developed and executed marketing strategies to promote adventure tourism experiences.
- Engaged with clients to understand their needs and provide exceptional service throughout their journey.

Community Coordinator, Northern Region

Arizona Coalition for Military Families | March 2019 - May 2022

- Collaborated with local organizations and communities, across all six northern Arizona counties, developed and implemented multi-faceted strategies, tools, and resources needed to enrich the lives of service members, veterans, and their families.