

2026 Scottsdale City Council Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Michelle Ugenti-Rita
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Years in Scottsdale: 45 Years



Motivation, Values, and Governance

Why are you seeking election to Scottsdale City Council?

I'm running because, as a native of Scottsdale and 12-year veteran of the State Legislature, I care deeply about the city and want to protect what makes it so special. Scottsdale is an exceptional place, with a world-renowned reputation as a top-tier tourism destination, a vibrant art community, and a commitment to community well-being.

Our Western spirit should mean something. It reflects independence, grit, and a desire to forge our own path. I want to defend Scottsdale against those who would let it become ordinary -- overbuilt, compromised, and disconnected from the people who live here.

What pushed me to step up was seeing the lawful, certified Axon referendum, signed by 26,000+ residents, taken away from voters by Democrat Solange Whitehead. That's not how our system should work. Residents deserve a real voice in the decisions that shape their city, and I will fight to protect that.

If elected, what would you most like to accomplish during your term?

If elected, what I most want to accomplish is restoring trust in how Scottsdale is governed, ensuring our growth stays true to the General Plan and our character, and protecting our long-term water security.

I also want to help unify the Council so we can work more effectively on behalf of residents. Just as important, I want to protect Scottsdale's brand and identity. That means making decisions that preserve what makes this city special, not allowing it to become overbuilt and Unrecognizable.

At the end of my term, success to me would mean residents feel heard, our decision-making process is consistent, and Scottsdale is still clearly Scottsdale—strong, distinctive, and true to its roots.

Are there any matters that may reasonably come before the City Council in which you would have a potential conflict of interest? If yes, please describe it generally.

No

Governing documents you have reviewed in preparation for your candidacy:

Scottsdale City Charter, Scottsdale General Plan 2035, Scottsdale Character Area Plans

Processes: Created, Improved, Reduced, or Eliminated

Please address which City of Scottsdale (COS) or citizen processes you believe should fall into the following categories.

No Response

No Response

No Response

No Response

Conflict Resolution

When faced with disagreement among City Council members, what approach would you take to encourage productive discussion and reach effective outcomes?

I have and will continue to focus on facts, shared goals, and respectful dialogue.

Vision, Community, and Quality of Life

Vision for Scottsdale

What is your long-term vision for Scottsdale over the next 10–20 years?

Scottsdale should remain a premier city defined by intentional growth, strong neighborhoods, and a high quality of life. That means protecting our desert character, ensuring access to reliable, clean water, and maintaining economic vitality without overdevelopment. We must balance prosperity with preservation.

Community Engagement

How will you engage with residents and neighborhoods before making policy decisions?

I've always made accessibility a priority in my public service, and that won't change. I've built a reputation for responding, showing up, and having real conversations, even when the issues are tough.

Public Safety & Neighborhood Quality of Life

What actions would you prioritize to improve public safety and neighborhood quality of life citywide?

Public safety is the foundation of a strong community. I will prioritize fully supporting our police and fire departments and ensuring they have the resources they need to do their jobs effectively. That includes empowering our police to enforce and defend our laws, consistently and fairly, and making it clear there will be no stand-down orders when it comes to protecting public safety. That is why I am endorsed by the Scottsdale Police Association and our county sheriff, Jerry Sheridan, for the Scottsdale City Council.

Noise Management and Enforcement

Noise management and enforcement have been ongoing concerns in certain areas of Scottsdale, including high-activity and entertainment districts. What is your approach to balancing vibrant activity areas with improved enforcement of existing and future noise standards to protect nearby neighborhoods?

Adhere to existing zoning laws. Keep residential zoning for homes and commercial zoning for retail, restaurants, and entertainment. We can support vibrant districts by enforcing existing standards. Consistent enforcement (not selective enforcement) is key to protecting nearby residents.

Growth, Land Use, and Housing

Key Issues for City Council

What do you see as the three most important issues currently facing the City Council?

Overdevelopment, water, and quality of life.

Key Issues for Residents

What do you see as the three most important issues currently facing the City Council?

Same as the issues currently facing the City Council.

Land Use and Zoning Framework

How should the General Plan guide rezoning and land use decisions?

The General Plan must be the foundational document, not a suggestion.

Land and Zoning Framework

Under what circumstances, if any, do you support increases/decreases in building height or density?

I do not support finding workarounds to building heights or density restrictions, like my democratic opponents do. If the Council is constantly overriding these restrictions, it undermines the entire purpose of having them in the first place.

Breaking from the norm should be the exception, not the rule, and only considered when there is a clear, compelling public benefit and compatibility with surrounding areas.

Rural and Low-Density Areas

How should Scottsdale approach rezoning requests affecting rural or low-density areas?

These areas should be protected. Rezoning should respect existing character and resident expectations.

Conditional Zoning and Enforcement

What is your view on conditional zoning approvals and compliance enforcement?

Conditional zoning should be used judiciously and is only effective if it is enforced. Conditions must be clear, measurable, and tied directly to compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods. If conditions are not met, there should be consequences.

Conditional Zoning and Enforcement

Under what conditions should approvals be modified or revoked by City Council action, or allowed to expire?

- Conditions are violated
- Material facts change
- Community impacts differ significantly from what was represented

Conditional Zoning and Enforcement

How would you achieve improved code enforcement?

As a strong supporter of small businesses and local merchants, I will encourage city staff to better and more clearly communicate what is expected of businesses to comply with applicable codes. The city must also prioritize consistency. Selective enforcement undermines public trust. We should ensure adequate staffing, clear reporting mechanisms for residents, and accountability in follow-through.

Major Redevelopment Projects

What principles should guide City Council decisions on large-scale redevelopment projects that significantly affect surrounding neighborhoods or infrastructure?

Large redevelopment projects can completely change the character of an area, so they need to be approached carefully. For me, it comes down to a few basic questions: does it fit the character of the area, can our infrastructure support it with any additional infrastructure needs paid for by the development, and is it consistent with the General Plan? If not, it shouldn't move forward. And residents need to be part of the conversation early, not at the end when decisions are already made.

Housing Affordability and Workforce Housing

What role, if any, should the city play in addressing housing affordability for workforce residents?

I do not believe solving housing affordability is a municipal issue. It is largely driven by broader economic factors like interest rates, land availability, and construction costs – areas that are outside the city's control. The free market ultimately dictates the housing market.

The City's role should be limited to maintaining clear, consistent regulations and avoiding policies that drive up costs.

Economy, Infrastructure, and City Operations

Water Sustainability

Following the shift from the 2024 Sustainability Plan to the current Sustainability Task Force, what is your vision for Scottsdale's long-term water resiliency? Specifically, how would you prioritize competing needs such as the expansion of the **Advanced Water Treatment facility** for direct potable reuse, **continued aquifer 'banking'**, and community-facing incentives like **turf removal rebates**?

Scottsdale's long-term water resiliency must begin with one core principle: we must live within our water means. Water policy should be based on what our existing and projected water supply can responsibly sustain, not on growth demands. What I do not support is approving growth that exceeds our assured water capacity. Current Scottsdale residents should not bear the consequences of overbuilding beyond what our water portfolio can sustain. I also oppose special water carve-outs for developers or policies that treat apartment projects differently than single-family neighborhoods when it comes to water accountability and usage standards. Finally, Scottsdale must aggressively defend its allocation of the Colorado River at both the State Legislature and in Washington, D.C.

Transportation and Infrastructure

What priorities should guide updates to the Transportation Master Plan?

My priority is making sure we're addressing real congestion issues in the areas where residents feel it most, in addition to planning for growth. That means improving traffic flow, maintaining the roads we already have, and being thoughtful about where expansion actually makes sense.

We also need to be mindful of capacity and the cost to address it. Infrastructure should support responsible growth—not chase it. Equally important, Scottsdale shouldn't operate in a vacuum. We need to stay coordinated with regional partners to make sure our transportation system works as part of the broader network.

Transportation and Infrastructure

How should parking needs be addressed, particularly in high-activity areas?

Brick and mortar retail, restaurants, and entertainment establishments need parking so customers are able to patronize their businesses.

Entertainment and Activity Districts

What considerations should guide the creation, regulation, and ongoing oversight of entertainment or special activity districts?

These districts can be a great asset to Scottsdale, but they have to be managed responsibly. That means clear expectations, consistent enforcement, and making sure impacts like noise, safety, and parking are actually addressed.

Short-Term Rentals and Neighborhood Impacts

What tools should cities have to manage short-term rentals and mitigate neighborhood impacts?

The authority to regulate short-term rentals should be returned to the local level so each municipality can handle them appropriately.

Economic Development and Tourism

What role should the City Council and city administration play in economic development partnerships, tourism promotion, and cultural investments?

Scottsdale already has a strong, well-established brand, which means the City Council should be thoughtful about partnerships and investments. The Council's role is to maintain an environment that supports businesses, the arts, and attracts people to visit.

Fiscal Policy and Accountability

Fiscal Sustainability

Fiscal sustainability is often debated but rarely defined. To understand your approach to the city's long-term financial health:

How do you personally define "Fiscal Sustainability" for the City of Scottsdale?

Fiscal sustainability is about being responsible with taxpayer dollars and planning for the long term. It means living within our means, maintaining strong reserves, and not taking on obligations we can't sustain.

What priority level should the Council assign to sustainability versus immediate community needs?

We must balance today's needs with tomorrow's realities and not sacrifice long-term stability for short-term decisions.

What specific actions would you take to ensure the Council remains focused on these principles during the budget process?

During my 11 years as a member of the appropriations committee, I gained the experience necessary to carefully scrutinize departmental budgets, expenditure requests, and revenue projections. Revenue projections must be realistic in order to avoid future or mid-year spending adjustments.

Revenue and Expenditures

The city must constantly balance its income sources with its service obligations. What specific principles should guide your decisions to create, increase, or eliminate city revenue sources (e.g., taxes, fees, or bonds)?

When evaluating budgets during my tenure in the legislature, it was crucial to first look at the budget in its totality and then prioritize the expenditures based on their relationship to the core functions of government. I will utilize this same philosophy at the city.

How would you prioritize spending when city revenues exceed expectations versus when they fall short?

When revenue exceeds projections, we should pay down debt, strengthen reserves, take care of deferred maintenance, and avoid ongoing spending increases we may not be able to sustain, cut taxes, and/or eliminate fees so that our revenue better aligns with our expenditures.

When revenues fall short, the priority should be protecting core services (i.e. infrastructure, public safety), cutting unnecessary spending, and avoiding knee-jerk revenue increases.

Departmental Performance and Accountability

Defining a budget is only the first step; ensuring those funds are used effectively is the second. How would you improve transparency and performance measurement across city departments?

Transparency isn't complicated; residents should be able to clearly see and understand how their tax dollars are being spent and how decisions are being made. That starts with following open meeting laws and respecting both the letter and the spirit of them. We should not be overusing executive

sessions to avoid discussing consequential or controversial issues in public. If it matters to residents, it should be discussed openly whenever possible.

What metrics or "red flags" would you look for to determine if a department is being held accountable for its spending and results?

Red flags to me are things like cost overruns without explanation, mid-year supplemental funding requests, missed timelines, or projects that keep needing more funding without clear results.

Regional and State Relations

Representing Scottsdale at the State Level

Cities do not control state legislation, but they are often affected by it. How would you approach working with state legislators and regional partners to communicate Scottsdale's interests and concerns on state-level issues that impact the city?

I bring a level of experience no other candidate in this race can offer. I am the only candidate who has served in the Legislature, chaired Government Committees in both the House and Senate, which oversee cities and counties, and worked directly with executive agencies and the Governor's Office. This sets me apart from my opponents in an unprecedented way.

That experience matters because it means I understand how decisions are made at the state level—and how to influence them. I won't be learning on the job, like my opponents. I already know how to navigate the process, build coalitions, and advocate effectively.

I also have long-standing working relationships with legislative staff and key stakeholders, which allows me to engage early, communicate clearly, and get real results for Scottsdale.

This level of experience and access is something Scottsdale has never had at the Council level. It will make a real difference in protecting municipal authority and our interests, and ensuring Scottsdale has a strong, effective voice at the Capitol.

Civic Leadership & Final Insights

Please list organizations, civic volunteer involvement, and any Scottsdale boards, commissions, or task forces you have served on, including the year(s).

Chairman of the Following:
House Elections Committee
House Ways and Means Committee
Senate Finance Committee
Senate Elections Committee

Committee Member of the Following:
House and Senate Appropriations Committee
Senate Commerce Committee
Joint Legislative Budget Committee

Co-Chairman: Joint Legislative Ad Hoc Committee on Legislative Oversight of Emergency Executive Powers, 2020

Committee was critical next step in Arizona's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and our state's overall preparedness for future seasons of uncertainty. The study committee was tasked with providing an evaluation of state emergency power statutes, included in Title 26 and 36, and prepare necessary legislative recommendations.

Co-Chairman: Joint Legislative Ad Hoc Study Committee on the Tax Treatment of Digital Goods and Services, 2017

Committee to determine the appropriate nexus for levying a transaction privilege tax on a digital good or service sold in Arizona to the jurisdiction collecting it.

Chairman: Ambulance Medical Service Transportation Study Committee, 2013

Adopted recommendations for legislation to increase transparency and efficiency in the process for awarding Certificates of Necessity to Emergency Medical Transportation Services.

Chairman: House Ad Hoc Committee on Law Enforcement Certification, 2012

Investigated and addressed professional deficiencies of municipal police officers in the State of Arizona.

Affiliations: National Foundation for Women Legislators, Arizona State Director, Alexandria, VA, November 2014 to 2018 Women's Legislative Network of Nation Conference of State Legislatures, Regional Board Member, 2014 to 2016 Represent Western United States, Washington, DC, August 2016 to 2018

Additional Comments

Please share any additional information you believe would help voters better understand your approach to city government leadership.

Visit www.ElectMichelle.com to learn more.