



2015 Seattle City Council Affordable Housing & Homelessness Candidate Questionnaire Responses

Brianna Thomas City Council Position 1

There is unmet need for affordable homes in Seattle. The 2015 One Night Count found 2,813 people surviving outdoors within city limits after the shelters were filled. Of all Seattle households 15-20% pay more than half their income for housing costs. This number includes 62% of those with the lowest incomes.

1. If elected, what will you do ensure everyone in Seattle has the opportunity to live in a safe, healthy, affordable home?

I will be a champion for safe, healthy, affordable housing and will show this by watching over HSD to ensure it receives and properly administrates the funding it needs to support Seattle's affordable housing community. My background with the Washington Housing Alliance Action Fund has provided me with a detailed and personal understanding of this community and the challenges it faces. In this regard, I am unique among other candidates in this race. As a City Councilmember, I look forward to continuing working closely with the Washington Housing Alliance Action Fund as we consider inclusionary zoning, mitigation programs like linkage fees, expanding incentive programs under the Growth Management Act and direct public investment in housing.

As a renter who has been priced out of housing, I understand the need for better renter protections. As a member of the African American community, I understand the disparity in opportunities for housing in our community. These are perspectives we need on City Council. We are suffering through an affordability crisis. We must view City priorities and policies through this lens, just as we do with race and social justice.

People of color are disproportionately challenged by access to affordable homes. In Seattle, 52% of White households own their home, compared with just 29% of Black households and 27% of Latino households, according to 2010 Census data cited by the Mayor's office. According to the National Equity Atlas [<http://nationalequityatlas.org/node/7156>], in the Seattle area, people of color are more likely than Whites to be paying more than they can afford, whether they own or rent. Displacement and gentrification are pressing concerns as more low-income people, disproportionately people of

color, are forced to move outside the city into areas with fewer opportunities.

2. What is the city's role in addressing these disparities?

The City of Seattle has an obligation to explicitly acknowledge racial disparity in outcomes and take whatever steps necessary to prevent such disparity from continuing. If elected, I will do exactly that. The result of structural and institutional discrimination within Seattle must be addressed by the City Council. Failure to do so will prevent us from mitigating the impacts of decades of racial and economic discrimination. Historically, communities of color within Seattle are disproportionately threatened by displacement.

Currently only 30 affordable homes are available for every 100 very low-income households in need of housing in Seattle (2015 Washington State Housing Needs Assessment [<http://1.usa.gov/17BlyKr>]). Rapid growth in Seattle is causing an even greater need for more affordable housing, according to the Seattle Affordable Housing Nexus Study [<http://bit.ly/1Rrug1n>] commissioned by the City Council.

3. Do you support an inclusionary housing policy that goes beyond voluntary incentive zoning and requires that development contribute to affordable homes?

Yes

Yes, I support inclusionary housing policies that go beyond incentive zoning. Unfortunately, inclusionary and incentive zoning policies are insufficient to address our affordable housing crisis. We need to do more than mitigate the impacts of current and future development. We must also look at the need that exists within our community from decades of diminishing affordable housing. Mitigation policies only go so far. Mitigation policies cannot address all the damage that has been done to our housing market. I support using linkage fees to generate funding for the new development of affordable housing, but this needs to be supplemented by other forms of direct investment.

Housing costs in Seattle are outpacing incomes. According to data collected by the Mayor's office, at the average wage for their profession, a medical

assistant living and working in Seattle cannot afford the average 1-bedroom apartment. An elementary school teacher cannot afford the average 2-bedroom apartment. The situation is not improving on its own: gross median rents in Seattle have increased more sharply than in any other large city in the U.S. in recent years (Seattle Times, 9-18-2014 [<http://bit.ly/1zPZidy>]).

4. Do you support asking the state legislature to remove the state ban on rent regulation?

Yes

Olympia has unreasonably tied the hands of local jurisdictions when addressing issues of affordability. Removing this ban should be a core priority in the City's legislative agenda and focus of the lobbying efforts of our Office of Intergovernmental Relations.

I also think that we need to have a meaningful conversation about tenant protection. It is immoral that we are economically evicting seniors across the city, that families are finding it hard to find places they can feel secure in establishing roots for years to come.

I am in favor of looking at a graduated rate increase with commensurate notification. Currently a 10% increase in rent gives renters 60 days notice. A 50% increase, still 60 days. 200%? 60 Days. I think that creating new bench marks of notification is the least we can do to protect the 50% of the city that rents their homes. While I am open to working on the details, we know that the system currently in place is leading to record numbers of displacement. This week alone I have seen four postings, or GoFundMe Appeals, in my network of folks being forced out of their homes due to unsustainable rent increases. This must stop.

The Seattle City Council recently passed an ordinance authorizing encampments in certain areas for people experiencing homelessness. An amendment called for studying the impacts of allowing encampments in residential areas.

5. Should encampments for people experiencing homelessness be allowed in residential areas?

Yes

Right now we rely on the Faith community to shoulder the majority of the responsibility of Tent Cities across the region. This burden shouldn't be carried by these constant stewards of kindness and decency alone. It is also high time that we allow the communities that want to host encampments to do so. There remains a palpable sentiment across the city that the best solutions are ones where we remove the visibly poor from our daily lives. This is not solely the problem of the downtown core, and forcing the business community into the position of the sole villain is unfair. We have poverty all over the city, we should be working toward solutions all over the city as well.

People experiencing homelessness often face local regulations making it difficult simply to exist. Seattle has banned sitting on sidewalks in some areas during certain times of day. Brushing teeth in public restrooms was recently banned in a neighboring city. Attempts to ban “aggressive” panhandling and smoking in public parks are efforts to address public comfort and safety, but could result in targeting people experiencing homelessness.

6. How should the city balance the rights of people experiencing homelessness with the comfort and safety of all Seattle residents?

There is a sentiment, across our city and across our state, that desperately wants to remove any signs of poverty from our daily lives. As though if we can't see the poor, they cease to be. This attitude has given rise to a series of attempts to "outlaw" visible poverty. It just might be time to let the public be a little uncomfortable, to make sure we see people that are in need. It is my hope that these visual reminders support the existing political will shown by tireless advocates making moves to actually DO something aggressive about it.

While some members of the Burien City Council may be comfortable denying people access to life sustaining activities, including basic hygiene, I am not.

According to Zillow, more than a quarter of Seattle’s “low-end homes” (those valued in the bottom third of home values for their market) are underwater. These homes tend to be occupied by low-income and fixed-income homeowners or renters.

7. Do you support a mortgage premium reduction plan to address foreclosures in Seattle?

Yes

8. Please suggest other strategies to prevent low-income people from losing their homes that you would support as a city council member:

I am interested in exploring principal reduction strategies to help low-income people with their mortgages, and finding ways to keep them in their homes. It is unthinkable that there are no tools available to the city, outside of directing working people with limited time, to other organizations for help.