



2015 Seattle City Council Affordable Housing & Homelessness Candidate Questionnaire Responses

Bruce A. Harrell City Council Position 2

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?

The answer is every available tool that is legally permissible under state law and creates more housing stock that can be available to low and moderate income residents. Seattle needs more housing in our inventory. Seattle tops the list of the fastest-growing big cities, ranking number one a few years ago and fifth recently by Forbes. With rents rising, it is becoming increasingly unaffordable for health care workers, retail service jobs, child care providers, and hospitality workers and lower wage earners, many of whom are people of color or immigrants and refugees or fixed income residents.

I support the initial recommendations of Mayor Murray to build 50,000 housing units over the next 10 years with 20,000 of these units being affordable units for those earning 80% area median income and below. I support building affordable housing on vacant or underdeveloped public land and a dedicated general-fund source to build more affordable housing units. We need to make sure households earning 30% area median income (\$26,000) and 30-50% AMI (44,800) have the opportunity to live and work in this city. I support a data-driven inclusionary housing policy in the city's toolbox to create affordable homes for low wage workers and families. The \$145 million housing levy passed in 2009 will expire in 2016. I support a renewal of the housing levy at a higher number as part of our toolbox to meet our affordable housing targets.

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?

In the coming year, as we receive a legislative package from the Mayor and recommendations from the Housing Affordability and Livability Advisory Committee, it will be critical for us to use the Race and Social Justice Initiative Toolkit to ensure we maintain affordability and diversity in this city. If families and individuals move outside the city to find less expensive housing, we will lose the diversity that makes Seattle so great. Some would say this is modern day segregation. This also negatively impacts the environment and our traffic with these individuals commuting in from outside of Seattle.

This year, Seattle is in the process of updating our Comprehensive Plan. Called Seattle 2035, it is a yearlong effort to talk about where we are now and our vision for the next 20 years. As part of that work, the Council recently passed Resolution 31577, confirming the City's core value of race and social equity as one of the foundations on which the Comprehensive Plan is built. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is now available for review and as part of the Comprehensive plan work, we required an Equity Analysis. The analysis produced findings and recommendations I will pursue and legislate in order to address these disparities. Using data, Seattle 2035 produced two maps: the displacement risk index and access to opportunity index. Seattle 2035 also establishes six pillars to ensure growth is equitable: "1) Advance economic mobility and opportunity— promote economic opportunities for marginalized populations and enhance community anchors. Provide access to quality education, training, and living-wage jobs; 2) Prevent residential, commercial and cultural displacement— enact policies and programs that allow marginalized populations, businesses, and community organizations the ability to stay in their community; 3) Build on local cultural assets— respect local community character, cultural diversity, and values. Preserve and strengthen cultural communities; 4) Promote transportation and connectivity— prioritize investment in effective and affordable transportation that supports transit-dependent communities; 5) Develop healthy and safe neighborhoods for everyone— create neighborhoods that enhance community health through access to public amenities, healthy food, and safe environments, for everyone; 6) Equitable access to all neighborhoods— leverage private

development to fill gaps in amenities and expand the supply and variety of housing and employment choices." The role of the City moving forward is to implement this plan and look at all budget and legislative matters through a disparity lens. I have a strong record in this regards by passing the unprecedented race and social justice legislation in 2009 that required Seattle to recognize both the diversity of our city—and diversity of opinion—before taking legislative and budget actions; protecting all communities.

As I stated earlier, I support the initial recommendations of Mayor Murray to build 50,000 housing units over the next 10 years with 20,000 of these units being affordable units for those earning 80% area median income. I support building affordable housing on vacant or underdeveloped public land and a dedicated general-fund source to build more affordable housing units. We need to make sure households earning 30% area median income (\$26,000) and 30-50% AMI (44,800) have the opportunity to live and work in this city. I support a data-driven inclusionary housing policy in the city's toolbox to create affordable homes for low wage workers and families. The \$145 million housing levy passed in 2009 will expire in 2016. I support a renewal of the housing levy at a higher number as part of our toolbox to meet our affordable housing targets.

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

I support a data-driven inclusionary housing policy in the city's toolbox to create affordable homes for low wage workers and families. I voted in support of Resolution 31551, stating the City's intent to implement an affordable housing linkage fee program, establishing policy parameters for such a program, and directing the Department of Planning and Development and the Office of Housing to develop regulations implementing an affordable housing linkage fee

program. The resolution and the Housing Affordability and Livability Advisory Committee will make policy recommendations for building and preserving 50,000 housings units in the next 10 years, with 20,000 of these units for individuals and families making 80 percent of the area median income and below. My decision will be based on data, what we can legally implement under Washington State Law and findings by the Housing Affordability and Livability Advisory Committee.

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

Similar to other state restrictions prohibiting local control (i.e. gun laws), I support local control.

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

I voted on the legislation and the amendment in March to support up to three homeless encampments. I originally supported and voted for a similar encampment bill in 2013 (In favor: Bagshaw, Harrell, Licata, O'Brien; Opposed: Burgess, Clark, Conlin, Godden, Rasmussen).

We funded an additional \$795,000 to help homelessness in last year's budget. We invest more than \$32 million a year in programming that impacts the most vulnerable people in our communities, particularly those at-risk of homelessness. We invest \$19 million a year in homeless prevention, intervention, and housing stabilization/supportive housing. The Office of Housing also provides approximately \$25 million annually in capital funding for the production and preservation of affordable housing, of which supports homeless housing projects.

I support maintaining and increasing our budget to address the growing homelessness issue.

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?

As you may recall, I was the key vote in 2010 in not enacting the “Aggressive Panhandling” law. Because of my vote, the legislation was subsequently vetoed. We are a compassionate city and a citation scheme is not the answer to balance the issues of homelessness and public safety. All of our decisions must be through a lens of NOT criminalizing poverty.

Our priority must be a more effective strategy and plan to help people experiencing homelessness in our communities. We began a study last year on recommendations and next steps to address homelessness and this report was completed in March 2015. The study concluded:

"1) Develop a policy framework and investment plan for the City's homelessness investments that aligns with and supports the regional Committee to End Homelessness' Strategic Plan, the provisions of the federal HEARTH Act, and evidence-based best practices. Funding processes and program and budget allocations should follow this policy framework.

2) Develop the capacity to collect and analyze program data, design consistent system-wide outcomes, and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of programs in

meeting outcomes. Support all homeless services agencies in required participation in Safe Harbors HMIS.

3) Use currently available predictive modeling tools to assess current system investments and needs and outlines funding and program shifts that may occur for prevention, intervention, and permanent housing programs to align with federal priorities and community need.

4) Develop a framework for adding funding that incorporates advocates, coalitions, and constituents in conversations with HSD, creating a consistent policy to transmit budget requests with supporting data, analysis, and anticipated impact. This allows community engagement to drive the way council and the mayor add funding, rather than occurring during the allocation process after funding is added.

5) Develop and fund a broader anti-poverty initiative, of which homelessness investments are a part. Long term investment strategies for homelessness will be most successful if there are fewer people coming into the system, and those that do are quickly connected with stable housing. This initiative should begin to address the racial disparities seen in our homeless system, but we must build on them and identify policies and procedures that perpetuate institutional racism and develop strategies for change.

6) Partner regionally to address broken or dysfunctional mainstream systems contributing to the increase in individuals experiencing homelessness."

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 support using any legal means to help homeowners renegotiate their underwater mortgages. If principal reduction can be done legally, this should be pursued. If a

municipality can use any of its eminent domain powers to make purchases to save the residences of homeowners, then it should be pursued. However, there are many legal hurdles that must be overcome. We must do everything we can to help homeowners renegotiate their underwater mortgages and stay in their homes. It does not help our residents or this city to have a glut of foreclosed properties on the market, lowering existing property values and leaving many families on the street. Banks received assistance from the federal government to help homeowners refinance, and should be strongly compelled to help the people they were designed to help.

The numbers have improved since 2013 when 38 percent of homes in Seattle were underwater. I was very supportive in voting for Resolution 31434 and 31495. Resolution 31434 stated, "The City Council will review the quantitative and qualitative data on the circumstances and causes of foreclosures and the foreclosure methods and practices of lenders, including reviewing any apparent inequities people in Seattle may face when lender foreclosure proceedings occur. Furthermore, the City Council in collaboration with the Office of Housing will explore all legal options to assist low-income homeowners who continue to suffer from the housing crisis." Resolution 31495 called on the City to, "explore mortgage principal reduction and other foreclosure prevention programs for low-income homeowners in order to support and revitalize communities impacted by the foreclosure crisis."

As part of the Resolutions noted above, the Council consulted with Professor Robert C. Hockett from Cornell University to compile a report for location solutions. Professor Hockett makes three recommendations:

"1) That the City of Seattle facilitate recourse to the Lease Swap strategy by its underwater mortgagors. This it could do very simply by outlining the strategy at its Foreclosure Resource website, providing sample "boilerplate" lease agreements, and linking directly to one or more of the house swapping sites that have proliferated on the web since the crash. Members of the local bankruptcy bar, and other lawyers, realtors and others acting in a pro bono capacity, doubtless would be willing to assist, as would the author of this Report.

2) That the City of Seattle form a committee to study the Eminent Domain strategy, with a view to determining what rendition of plan would best suit the City's values and needs. Members of the committee should bear in mind that there are multiple ways to structure the plan, and multiple kinds of provider from whom to seek assistance in either designing a plan from scratch or evaluating plans

offered by outside providers in response to a request for proposal (RFP). Once again local lawyers, financial professionals, and housing advocates, acting in a pro bono capacity, doubtless would be willing to assist, as again would the author of this Report.

3) That the City of Seattle form a committee to study the prospect of establishing a municipal land bank, charged with the task of taking possession of tax-foreclosed properties and converting them to beneficial community use, and giving priority to returning recently loan-foreclosed mortgagors either to their own recent properties or to like properties, pursuant to leasing agreements with “rent to own” options embedded. Again local professionals will doubtless be willing to assist, as again would the author of this Report."

We are using this report as a roadmap to prevent low-income people from losing their homes.