



2015 Seattle City Council Affordable Housing & Homelessness Candidate Questionnaire Responses

Catherine Weatbrook City Council Position 6

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?

We need to preserve existing affordable housing (SHA and naturally occurring), we need to build more, and we need both a levy and to look at leveraging the Seattle reserve funds to finance more units (CM Licata is working through this idea).

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?

I see the need for Seattle City Council action as vital, and the approaches here in groups of time frames:

Short term, we need to:

- Find additional funding to pay for partial rents
- Incentivize property owners to have their own voluntary low cap on rental prices, perhaps with other offsets.
- Identify naturally occurring affordable housing that's been held a long time, and start conversations with the land owners, possibly paying for the first right of refusal.

Mid term, we need to:

- Improve transportation options to lower that cost
- Create more affordable housing of all types
- Create more diverse housing types
- Close the wage gap, because it's the right thing to do and the majority living in poverty are women and if they were paid equally, they would struggle less.

Long term, we need to:

close the education gap

close the achievement gap

create a supply of affordable homes to purchase

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

We need housing NOW, not partial funding for a yet to be determined location, yet to be designed, and currently un-permitted future structure.

And, we need people to be able to live where they work. The separate buildings, feel too much like a separate but equal approach, rather than inclusionary.

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?

No

Rent control has failed everywhere it's been tried - New York and San Francisco are a bigger mess than Seattle. In addition, the state legislators with whom I've spoken, say it's not an option in any sort of short timeframe.

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

Yes, but with several requirements that apply to all encampment locations: Access to frequent public transportation, access to services, and with noise restrictions consistent with the zoning of the location.

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?

Seeing someone struggle, is uncomfortable. Allowing the same person struggle on the streets for years, is inhumane. Being a resident or a business that has to deal with human waste and piles of garbage, sometimes being threatened with fines by

the city for the illegal dumping, isn't right either. People need to feel safe in their communities. It's a challenging balance, made worse by the sheer number of homeless and the underfunding of needed services. Funding of effective programs is key, as is pairing social workers with police and businesses to help address the underlying causes of the 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 would explore zero cost refinancing to better interest rates, without income/job verification.

I would like to look at pairing these households with services & resources to make their homes sharable for added income and a partial solution to our affordable housing crisis.