



2015 Seattle City Council Affordable Housing & Homelessness Candidate Questionnaire Responses

Chas Redmond 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?

The city has been exploring different ways to approach this problem through the Mayor's committee on housing and livability and through additional non-profit and alliance group efforts to find solutions. From the set of solutions which have been offered to date, I would pursue a municipal banking institution which would enable funding for non-profit purchases of some threatened housing facilities. I would also support a legislative approach both city and state, if possible, which would provide relief for renters in the form of a universal background check approach with applicants paying a one-time only service fee which would then be available to any rental unit the individual applied for. I also support working directly with local developers and local financial institutions to find ways to provide additional incentives for the construction of both market-rate housing and to build more housing for those who can afford 60% to 30% of area mean rents. I would also work with local non-profits and faith-based organizations to see what financial and development options were available for these organizations and then work to find ways to implement development by these groups.

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 Mayor's HALA committee has produced recommendations which include the potential for a city-investment bank which could provide funding support for non-profits to develop housing. Impact fees need to be instituted with a portion of the income being set aside for development of affordable housing. We should also work directly with local developers to help development a framework where local developers can also build affordable housing through incentive support. City zoning needs to be looked at again from the perspective of allowing additional auxiliary dwelling unit development in neighborhoods in both SF and low-rise multiple occupancy zones. Some neighborhoods can support infill development. City Council and DPD should investigate which neighborhoods can be zoned to include auxiliary dwelling units or other types of housing which might fit such as townhouse units. We should consider bringing back other types of zoning such as adjacent and contiguous townhouse blocks. A cap on allowable year-over-year rent increases by percentage should be enacted. Inclusionary zoning should be debated and legislation passed to set certain areas of the city as inclusionary zones for development.

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

Neighborhoods should always contain mixes of old, new and revised or modified housing. Inclusionary zoning gives the city and developers tools which allow a discussion to occur regarding the best and most socially-conscious manner by which to redevelop or continue development in neighborhoods.

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

A rent stabilization program which allowed for rent increases based on actual costs or the rate-of-inflation would be preferable to an outright ban on rental rate increases. I strongly support a rent stabilization program developed in concert with property owners and renters and representatives of the renting community.

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 support temporary housing to alleviate homelessness in residential areas for the simple reason that limiting such temporary housing facilities in industrial zones or other "non residential" areas continues the segregation of the homeless from the rest of society. Putting a homeless camp in an industrial area surrounded by no amenities and no other community gives the impression to those within the camp that they are unwanted and are not worthy of being contained in a area with other residents. This is a bad message and does not help those in need of housing.

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?

I believe the city should work with the homeless population to enable a better understanding of what is available to those needing shelter. Arresting individuals for sidewalk squatting or bench squatting is an inhuman response to those in need. The city should stop immediately these practices and instead move towards an intervention approach which works with the homeless rather than against them. Yes, some abuse the concept but none are so abusive as to warrant being arrested for exercising simple human rights.

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 also favor a municipal bank approach which was capable of purchasing underwater homes and negotiating with current occupants for a quid-pro-quit approach whereby they stayed in the home, paid some nominal fee on their mortgage, and were involved and authorized to keep the home in good shape and to continue to operate as homeowners. We have learned that one of the pathways to stable wealth is property ownership, the city should encourage a co-ownership or other approaches to keep current occupants living in their homes.