



2015 Seattle City Council Affordable Housing & Homelessness Candidate Questionnaire Responses

Debora Juarez City Council Position 5

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?

North Seattle remains one of the few places in the City where it is relatively affordable to raise a family or retire, but this legacy is threatened by skyrocketing rents and housing prices. I will work to advance an “all of the above” agenda to ensure housing remains affordable and available in my district and Seattle as a whole. Seattle faces a serious deficit of affordable housing. I will introduce legislation to use the city's bonding capacity to build affordable and workforce housing on publicly-owned land, and will fight to make sure this endeavor reaches the finish line. I support strengthened tenant's rights legislation that makes it more difficult for landlords to unfairly evict their tenants or charge them excessive or deceptive fees. I am also supportive of a city council resolution asking the state to lift the ban on rent-control ordinances, so Seattle can evaluate whether a 21st-century rent-stabilization system is the right fit for our community.

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?

Seattle needs to address these disparities in a meaningful, pragmatic way. I favor a two-pronged approach to this problem. First, the city needs to reduce the educational disparities that contribute to non-white populations being less prepared for Seattle's job market. The most effective means of achieving this goal is to expand Seattle's pre-k initiative to reach every child in the city. The other area the city can help reduce gentrification is expanding support of employment sectors that historically and currently provide family-wage jobs to members of minority communities.

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

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

The City needs to have an honest conversation about a 21st-century approach to rent stabilization.

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

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?

Seattle's boom in its number of residents experiencing homelessness is directly linked to the drastic slashing of the state mental health care budget. The city should be a leading voice in advocating for the restoration of funding at the state level. As far as legislation put before the city council is concerned, we should never take approaches that effectively criminalize homelessness. Instead, the city council needs to take proactive, real-world measures that both emphasize with the plight of the homeless and take a data-driven lens to the situation. One example of this approach might prove to be expanding the pre-recovery housing program for Seattle's chronically homeless.

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 think the city needs to be a strong advocate for holding banks accountable for unethical or predatory lending practices. I support research into Seattle foreclosures in order to determine where these patterns exist.