



## 2015 Seattle City Council Affordable Housing & Homelessness Candidate Questionnaire Responses

### **Kshama Sawant City Council Position 3**

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?**

Seattle is facing a severe housing crisis, with skyrocketing rent and overall unaffordability of housing leading to displacement and homelessness. The city needs to seriously address homelessness by fully funding human services, and in the budget process last year, I proposed the full \$30 million suggested by the Seattle Human Services Coalition. In addition, the city needs to create a public option for affordable housing by building thousands of city-owned, high-quality units at below market rates for all strata of those in need. This could be done using the city's excess bond capacity and instituting maximum linkage fees to make big developers pay to fund affordable housing.

I have proposed, along with Councilmember Licata, a resolution demanding that Washington State lift the undemocratic ban on rent control. I also call for a Tenant's Bill of Rights, which would include expanding relocation assistance (currently \$3,250) should be expanded to cover those economically evicted by major rent increases. Tenants also should have six months advance notice of a major rent increase, rather than the two months legally required now. Lastly, we should cap security deposits and move-in fees at no more than one month's worth of rent.

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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 Seattle City Council needs to take immediate action against skyrocketing rents to address gentrification, and the breakup of our historic communities of color like the Central District. As mentioned previously, we need rent control and to build thousands of units of city-owned affordable housing. Further, we need to address the disparity in incomes by enforcing the \$15 an hour minimum wage and local hire ordinances, while also creating thousands of good paying union jobs by building city-owned housing and through a major expansion of public transit.

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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

Absolutely. Market solutions, including voluntary incentive zoning, have utterly failed to stem the skyrocketing housing costs in this city. We need real inclusionary zoning as well as maximum linkage fees. That's also why I am fighting to create a public option for housing by building thousands of high-quality, affordable, city-owned units for middle- and working-class people. This can be paid for by using Seattle's excess bond capacity, taxing big developers, and building on vacant city land. We also need to fight for the right of local jurisdictions like Seattle to pass progressive taxes such as a tax on millionaires to fund the building of additional affordable housing units.

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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

Absolutely. Rent control can be a lifeline for working people facing out of control housing costs. In April, Councilmember Licata and I held an affordable housing town hall to discuss how to address the spiraling costs. At this event, we announced the resolution we have drafted demanding that Washington State lift the undemocratic ban on rent control. In addition to passing this resolution, we need to build a movement in Seattle to pressure the state to end the ban.

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**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 put forward an amendment to this same ordinance in the Seattle City Council to include all residential areas in this study. Working alongside housing justice activists, we pressured the city council to adopt it. We still need to fight to ensure implementation once the study is complete.

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**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?**

The solution to homelessness in Seattle is not to criminalize it. Instead, we should fully fund job programs and human services. Building thousands of publicly owned affordable housing units would address the housing crisis and homelessness, and also create thousands of good-paying union jobs that could be part of a broader jobs program for unemployed or underemployed Seattle residents. Massively expanding public transit would also create many new jobs, as well as improve the ability for more people to commute to jobs throughout the city. We need tax the wealthy and big corporations to fully fund human services.

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**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

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

We need real mortgage relief for homeowners. Over 16,500 Seattle families have lost their homes to foreclosure since 2008. The city needs to stop dragging its feet and finally implement a principal reduction program to keep more families from losing their homes. While big banks and developers have gotten handouts, the city has turned its back on working and middle class homeowners.