



2015 Seattle City Council Affordable Housing & Homelessness Candidate Questionnaire Responses

Rob Johnson City Council Position 4

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?

I'm strongly in favor of significantly increasing the funds in 2016's housing levy. I'd like to see us explore more housing on public lands and work more closely with Sound Transit on surplus properties to build more transit oriented development that could be targeted for affordable housing and in particular will advocate that the ST3 plan in 2016 includes a \$100 million affordable housing fund to facilitate more low income housing near light rail. I'd like to see us increase our height limits around Sound Transit light rail stations, particularly in the University District, Roosevelt, and Northgate. I'd like to see us go to Olympia and get the authority (if we don't believe we have it already) to implement a form of land value taxation to (ideally) flatten out some of our construction booms and busts.

Linkage fees are a great idea if we think that development and growth are going to continue at the astounding rate they have in the last several years, indefinitely. But the challenge for me is that linkage fees only come in when new development occurs creating a similar boom and bust to the revenues that we would rely on for the construction, acquisition, and maintenance of more affordable housing. In order to flatten out those booms and busts, I'd favor a land value taxation model which would charge landowners based on both the assessed value of their land as well as a base minimum of the zoning of their land (regardless of the structure built on that land). This model has been proven to be successful in Pennsylvania and I believe would result in more consistent funding for affordable housing through taxes that aren't tied only to development and construction, but the value (and potential value) of land that developers acquire.

I also am a big proponent of the Housing First model which we have used in this region for a long time. Giving housing to those with mental illness and substance abuse problems and then working with them to get treatment and assistance has

been a proven path to reducing the number of individuals that end up homeless again. We should be prioritizing those kinds of proven techniques to ensure that we're having the best impact we can to reduce homelessness in Seattle and in the region.

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's history of segregation and redlining has consistently left communities of color, immigrant communities, and low income families concentrated on the outskirts of the city in and/or near industrial areas. The subsequent results have been longer commute times, more traffic, wider roads, less tree canopy, less economic investment, food deserts, less funding for public schools, higher crime rates, increased air/water pollution, and many other urban planning challenges that lead to a downward spiral of social inequity. With housing costs continuing to skyrocket, we are pushing communities of color and immigrants further south and out of the city into places like Renton, Tukwila, Federal Way, and unincorporated King County - where public transportation, walkable communities with good supportive land uses, and access to nearby health care, educational opportunities, and social services are few and far between. That's why finding more funding for affordable housing and affordable public transportation particularly in Seattle and South King County is crucial to low-income and communities of color exiting that downward spiral of poverty and into the middle class. Recent articles in the New York Times (http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/upshot/transportation-emerges-as-crucial-to-escaping-poverty.html?_r=0&abt=0002&abg=0) have continued to highlight what I've always advocated for; that access to good public transit is one of the few opportunities to ensure a pathway out of poverty and into the middle class. I've worked closely with the city's Office of Sustainability and the Environment, the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, non-profits like

Got Green, Puget Sound Sage, One America, ACRS, and El Centro de la Raza and will continue to be a champion to ensure that those that are most likely to be impacted by climate change's effects receive the public infrastructure investments to ensure we are reversing historical disinvestment in these neighborhoods.

To boost home ownership, I'm a big supporter of nonprofits such as the Homestead Community Land Trust which helps middle- to low-income folks purchase affordable homes, often with a mortgage payment that is less than rent. Combined with some of the affordable housing tools mentioned above, our city should be working in partnership with groups like Homestead to bolster these programs, provide both the network and resources for similar groups to get started, and place an emphasis on historical neighborhoods and communities of color within city limits.

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 do support inclusionary zoning policies, but I think that it is an idea that requires careful planning and consideration before it is implemented. Inclusionary zoning isn't a panacea, but it can be one of the tools that we use to help increase the number of residents living in affordable housing, particularly near frequent and reliable transit service. In order to make inclusionary zoning work, we need to make sure that whatever rates we settle on are geographically / neighborhood appropriate for different parts of the city, and are accompanied by the right incentives (height, neighborhood amenities, etc).

We also have to look at other solutions like a Real Estate Excise Tax that specifically funds affordable housing - so that the sale of single family homes are also contributing to our solutions. As an owner of a single family home, I believe it

is also my responsibility to help fund additional affordable housing, this shouldn't be levied only on those developing new properties. This is especially crucial given that 65% is zoned for single family homes, which is only exacerbating our housing problem. I get a tax break based on my mortgage interest payments and I should be helping to fund solutions to our housing crisis.

In terms of public lands and developments above and around the upcoming light rail stations, we should absolutely be requiring this kind of zoning, as we're doing with the station opening up in Capitol Hill. If elected, I would advocate for Sound Transit 3 to include a \$100 million affordable housing fund to be used on development around light rail stations. For example, in District 4, I strongly support, and believe it's absolutely crucial, that we use the derelict Sisley properties for affordable housing as it will be just a few blocks away from the Roosevelt light rail station.

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

I wouldn't support a rent control ordinance because I don't believe it would be legally enforceable. Rather than distracting people with slogans I'd prefer to focus on solutions. Rent control is one of the potential tools in our toolbox, but only if we have the authority to enact it, which we currently do not. In some cities, when used too broadly, rent control has only exacerbated the housing affordability crisis. If the legislature were to give Seattle that authority (a very big long shot) then I would support rent control being one tool among a myriad of others to keep housing affordable. I think that looking for a one way / option solution to keeping low-income folks living in our city is a mistake and we have to provide housing options that work towards folks at multiple income levels. Our biggest problem with housing and gentrification is the lack of market-rate housing that is available.

As neighborhoods like Ballard and Capitol Hill are significantly increasing the amount of market-rate housing, I'm curious to see the long term effects on rents in older buildings and the renter retention rates in these neighborhoods. However, allowing persistent and unpredictable increases in rent is not only morally wrong, but also bad for our economy and culture.

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'm a supporter of increased encampments in our city and support Councilmember Sawant's amendment to study the impacts of allowing encampments in residential areas. If elected, I'll work to ensure that the homeless are not redlined out of certain neighborhoods in our city. I would work to ensure that any new encampments that are allowed would be placed near frequent transit service and that we have the social service workers available to get tent city residents access to the services they need.

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 a matter of public health, similar to the smoking ban in restaurants, I do support the ban on smoking in public parks. Secondhand smoke has serious health effects, particularly for children, and disproportionately affects people of color and

those of low-income. Beyond that, we have a huge homelessness problem in our city that we have yet to adequately recognize or address. This is largely due to cycle of poverty and criminality that are usually caused by underlying inequity in our society. Perpetuating this cycle of poverty by increasingly criminalizing the necessary habits (such brushing ones teeth) for those that are surviving homelessness is only going to exacerbate this problem. I've recently spoken with several Wallingford residents that have said they open their homes to people living in their cars in the neighborhood and they do that because of the infrequent accessibility to public restrooms in the neighborhood. As a councilmember I'd work to increase funding for longer hours at our libraries, community centers, and non-profits like Solid Ground and churches that have been hosting car campers and tent encampments to ensure more regular and consistent access to basic facilities. I would also support opening future outposts of the urban rest stop in neighborhoods where we're experiencing prolonged and persistent 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 thought that the home weatherization work the city did during the Obama stimulus package was great. I'd like to see us fund an expansion of those programs and to work with groups like Got Green to ensure that we have a strong social equity and local hire component to its implementation. I'd like to see us pass legislation establishing a property tax exemption in exchange for stipulated rent stabilization for existing rental housing owners (especially in older buildings) that undertake significant energy efficiency upgrades. And I'd like to see us work with nonprofits to increase promotion and implementation of community based solarization and other low carbon sources.

With 65% of Seattle being zoned for single family homes, we can also provide thousands of additional affordable housing units by easing the restrictions on building Mother-In-Law, ADU, and DADU's to allow for more alley and backyard developments.