



2015 Seattle City Council Affordable Housing & Homelessness Candidate Questionnaire Responses

Shannon Braddock 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?

There is no doubt about it, Seattle, as the fastest growing city in the country, is facing a severe housing affordability crisis. As demand increases rents and housing costs are rising rapidly throughout Seattle. Preserving and producing affordable housing must be one of our city's top priorities. I am a longtime supporter of the voter approved Housing Levy to fund affordable housing construction. However, even the levy wasn't enough to keep up with the increased demand for affordable housing. As such, I support an expansion of the levy and setting policies that require certain levels of affordable housing within our city. A diversity of individuals – age, income, ethnicity, occupation – is important to our city and communities. It is also important to continue to fight for living wage jobs for our residents so that they can both work and live here if they choose.

I am committed to fighting for policies that enable more families and individuals to affordably reside in Seattle but I am concerned that we are currently creating an “us vs. them” mentality when it comes to housing and developers. I plan to explore the opportunities created by impact and linkage fees and I am determined to bring all stakeholders to the table in order to create effective and responsible policies to provide the infrastructure necessary to meet the city's growing demand. I would like to provide incentives for accessory dwelling units such as mother in laws and garage apartments to provide more options in our single family neighborhoods and I would like to review our Multi Family Tax Exemption incentives to potentially expand and build on that option. I am also excited about the work being done with impact investment to create affordable housing options. I look forward to reading the recommendations of the Mayor's HALA commission and I also support more policy work and financial support to create shelter and long-term housing for our homeless population. My leadership style is collaborative and transparent and if elected I would include low-income residents,

developers, land use experts, service providers and elected officials in discussions related to affordability. Working together we will come up with the most effective solutions.

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?

It is vital that our city and our communities work to address racial disparities in housing, jobs, our justice system and our education opportunities. The first step is being aware of the situation – many people believe that because they personally don’t identify as racist, that our institutional structure must also be without racial bias. We must highlight that this is not the case and work to remove barriers in job testing, housing opportunities and opportunities for access to resources needed to educate and implement progressive change. Our elected officials must identify the issues related to displacement and work on policies to lessen the undesirable outcome. Some areas the city can provide positive influence include local hire, apprenticeship utilization, community outreach about legal options and resources to support those options.

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 think the city should explore these policies and I'm hopeful the HALA will have a recommendation related to inclusionary zoning. I don't know what form that incentive zoning should take and continue to educate myself and talk with stakeholders involved to develop options for this path. Other rapidly growing cities, such as New York, have found that despite tax incentives and subsidies, a dismally low percentage of developers opted to voluntarily build below market rate units. Mandating affordable housing is becoming more and more urgent as prices skyrocket in Seattle. As I mentioned before, I am also excited to explore the opportunities created by both impact and linkage fees. These fees should be considered as a possible avenue for more fairly distributing the costs related to rapid development.

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

No. I do not believe rent control is a solution to housing affordability. (That said, as a councilmember I may support a resolution to the state to give our residents an option to make that decision with the popular vote although I would be unlikely to support it at the ballot). Support for rent control in Seattle may win populist applause lines, I believe the actual effects of the policy are proven to harm the vast majority of those it purports to assist. As progressive economist Paul Krugman notes, the actual adverse effects of a price ceiling on rents is "Sky-high rents on uncontrolled apartments, because desperate renters have nowhere to go -- and the absence of new apartment construction, despite those high rents, because landlords fear that controls will be extended." Housing costs are not under-control in the cities where rent control is most prevalent – New York, San Francisco,

Washington D.C.. In fact, the opposite is the case, these are the most expensive cities in the country.

I am unwavering in my commitment to addressing the housing affordability issue in Seattle. In fact, today, I likely couldn't afford to buy my own home! But I am equally unwavering in my belief that leadership and the ability to make real progress on this issue requires an objective look at the policies that actually have made an impact – regardless of their populist appeal. If I am elected to city council I plan to craft new affordable housing development policies with input from developers, land use experts, low-income residents, housing advocates, neighborhood groups, service providers and elected officials.

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, I support residential encampments as a stop gap solution. Homelessness touches the lives of too many in our city. Whether an individual or a family is sleeping on the street, in their car or crashing on a couch because they have nowhere else to go, it is unacceptable. It is imperative that our city continue to attempt new, bold and progressive strategies to address the homelessness crisis. With our shelters at maximum capacity we must provide encampments but it is equally important that encampments are not on the fringes of society but in areas where their residents can access transportation options and social services. Without access to vital human and social services the transition to permanent housing and a better life cannot begin.

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 reject policies criminalizing homelessness as they only serve to exacerbate the problem – we need rehabilitation, not punishment. The criminalization of homelessness is counter-productive in that it does nothing to solve the underlying problems that cause and perpetuate homelessness; moreover, it is expensive to police, arrest, process and send homeless folks through the court system. This money and these resources would be much more effective if allocated toward rehabilitation programs. Rehabilitation not only strikes at the root cause of homeless, it drives down the long-run costs to the city as the need for social services declines. Because mental illness, incarceration and homelessness are often inextricably linked I strongly support programs such as Crisis Respite and LEAD. Addressing these interrelated problems in a holistic manner with a strong emphasis on rehabilitation is vital.

That said, I do recognize there is a certain amount of inevitable tension between the homeless, business owners and other Seattle residents. The job of the City Council is to mediate between the interests of these various groups in a way that is equitable, transparent and inclusive. I believe as a councilmember I could effectively strike this balance. For example, on the issue of banning smoking in public parks – while I’m not inclined to support a total smoking ban, I would continue to support a ban in the designated children’s play areas of parks to further discourage smoking around children. Striking the proper balance between care for those who are experiencing homelessness and the safety and security concerns of all Seattle residents is imperative and I am committed to working with as many stakeholders as possible to find that equilibrium point.

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:

It is important that the City's current array of affordable housing policies, which are not sufficient to meet demand, be assembled into a single, coherent long-term strategy. We can begin by encouraging production, both via zoning which allows for more development and by incentivizing the private sector to build micro-units and cottage housing. We must ensure that mixed-income projects and low income housing programs received sufficient funding. I am also interested in exploring opportunities 'transit oriented development' by increasing density near light rail stations and other high transit corridors. I also want the city to look at expanding options to provide at-risk renters and homeowners with assistance for things like utility bills etc. as ways to keep people in their homes.