



2015 Seattle City Council Affordable Housing & Homelessness Candidate Questionnaire Responses

Tim Burgess City Council Position 8

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?

In 2013, my office drafted a Council resolution that started a process of assessing how best to develop more affordable housing in Seattle. We hired outside consultants and conducted assessments of what's available and how many more affordable units are needed. We developed the "linkage fee" concept and explored other options to create more affordable housing. This summer the Council will act on these various proposals, including those coming in June from the Mayor's affordable housing commission.

I do not believe the market alone will adequately address the issue of affordable housing and that's why I have supported higher fees associated with incentive zoning, the linkage fee concept, and doing more to insure that more affordable housing is available in our city. The incentive-zoning program in the last 2-1/2 years has raised approximately \$60 million in developer fees for affordable housing.

I favor making incentive zoning mandatory; in other words, developers would have to produce affordable housing or pay-in-lieu regardless of whether they took advantage of the rezone benefits offered by the city. The cities of Kirkland, Redmond, Federal Way and Bellingham have mandatory incentive zoning programs. Issaquah has recently adopted mandatory incentive zoning.

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?

As lower-income families move throughout the city—and beyond—because of the high costs of living, we have an obligation to provide high quality and effective transportation alternatives such as light rail and transit service so individuals can easily commute to their jobs, run errands and get around our city. Beginning in June, Seattle will see the largest increase in transit service in our history thanks to Seattle voters who approved the special transit measure last November.

As mentioned above, we also need to produce more affordable housing and increase the number of “rent restricted” units in the city which we can do by expanding highly productive government programs, such as the Housing Trust Fund and the MFTE program.

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

Yes, I strongly support mandatory incentive zoning policies. The Council will receive recommendations from the Mayor on this issue in late June. In addition to mandatory incentive zoning, other ideas include developer impact fees, incentives for building affordable housing, relaxing height restrictions, up-zoning major transportation corridors, increasing public investment in affordable housing, and using city-owned property for affordable housing. At my request last December, the City Attorney formed a working group of lawyers from his office and outside

legal counsel to prepare a comprehensive summary of state and local housing laws and regulations that will help the Council tackle these issues.

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

I favor asking the State Legislature to provide municipalities more options to increase the number of “rent restricted” units and to provide more flexibility for government supported affordable housing and to allow the MFTE program to be used for existing housing that is extensively remodeled as well as new construction.

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, the Council passed an ordinance allowing encampments in multi-family zoned residential areas of the city, but not single-family areas, and in neighborhood commercial zones. Single-family areas are currently restricted to single-family structures only. We do not allow shelters or other multi-family structures in single-family zones because of their intensity of use.

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 don’t equate homelessness with bad behavior or disorder; frankly, to do so demeans our residents who are experiencing homelessness. Much of the disorder people complain about is tied to individuals with serious mental health and/or alcohol/drug challenges. Shame on us for not providing adequate treatment and other services for these individuals. The City will soon begin installing new public toilets—the Portland Loo—to address essential bathroom needs for all people in our busiest pedestrian and tourist areas.

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?

No

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

No, I do not favor a municipal-based premium reduction plans unless they are funded with private or charitable funds. The state of Oregon and Boston have such programs, but not funded with state or city resources.

I continue to support the various federal and state programs designed to help individuals avoid foreclosure. Thankfully, the number of auctioned off homes at

the end of the foreclosure process continues to sharply decline compared to recent years.