

Girmay Zahilay Questionnaire Responses

- Do you support the creation of a King County transportation benefit district after the expiration of the Seattle Transportation Benefit District in 2020?

I support the creation of a King County transportation benefit district, there are too many areas in King County that don't have access to reliable public transit (including Skyway here in District 2) and this is a way to ensure we have a more equitable transit system.

- What priorities would you have for King County Metro during your term?

My top priorities for King County Metro are finding ways to expedite the transition to an all electric fleet before the 2045 goal, expand service to areas that don't have reliable bus service, increase the number of rapidride bus routes, find ways to significantly lower or give free passes to students and low income community members, etc.

- What role do you think King County should play in promoting alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle usage?

King County has a huge roll to play in this. King County Metro falls under the purview of the County Council, and as such has the ability to enact policies to increase ridership.

- Studies have shown that fare enforcement disproportionately impacts people of color and can trap people in a cycle of poverty. Do you think recent reforms implemented by Metro have gone far enough to address this problem?

While these reforms are a good first step, they don't go far enough in my opinion. Failure to pay a fare enforcement fine is one of the leading entryways that many of our young people, especially people of color, enter the criminal justice system. I am in favor of policies that reduce youth incarceration, and would like to work with fellow councilmembers on implementing policy that will keep people out of the justice system. Also, my ultimate aim is to push for universal free public transit which would eliminate most of this problem.

- The county council has imposed a farebox recovery target of 25% on King County Metro which limits the agency's flexibility and may force it to raise fares. Would you support keeping this target?

I would not, I would like to change the policy on this and examine raising rates for individuals with the ability to pay more.

- Would you have voted for the public funding of the Safeco field renovation approved in 2018 if you were on the county council at that time?

Absolutely not, I think that was an incredibly poor decision on behalf of the council and I am disappointed that they voted to give an enormous handout to a multibillion dollar company. Our number one priority must be building affordable and public housing and I would have used the money for that purpose.

- What do you think is the most important strategy or strategies King County can pursue to keep the county affordable to live in? What assumptions about affordability do those

strategies rely on?

Better regional coordination is needed to produce more affordable housing units, particularly Extremely Low-Income Housing (ELI) units for households with less than 30% AMI. Seattle has been the only municipality in the region really working these units and coordinated services, but they can't do it alone. While I'm excited that King County is getting more involved, other cities and counties need to commit more funding and make room for more shelters and ELI units in their communities too. A good place to start would be work toward fair share commitments for cities across the region targeted at ELI units and shelters. I'm optimistic about the passage of state legislation that allows public entities to consider discounting land for affordable housing; however, this is only the first step in producing affordable housing at scale on these properties.

The County owns surplus land. It should lease that land to King County Housing Authority so that we can build more public housing that isn't subject to the whims of private developers and landlords seeking profit.

Additionally, King County sets the property tax rates and can expand exemptions for low-income individuals, people on fixed incomes, and seniors.

- Under what circumstances would you vote to increase property taxes in King County?

I would prefer not to increase property taxes, but would rather look at more robust, sustainable, and progressive funding sources. For example, I would like to propose a King County public investment vehicle. This investment vehicle would be used to invest a portion of public pension funds into local infrastructure projects. In other words, public employees currently have retirement funds that are invested in a portfolio of assets, and I believe a portion of those funds should be invested in local infrastructure like public transit. Other municipalities, like Dallas, New York, and Los Angeles, have had similar strategies for investing public pensions in local infrastructure and have gotten positive returns for their public employees. The benefits of this public investment vehicle are that we have a source of funding that does not come from additional regressive taxation, public employees get a good return on investment, and we all get to benefit from the economic multiplier effects of investing in the local economy.

I would also like to look towards establishing a County Bank (a public bank) that would allow us to keep our money instead of paying interest and fees to Wells Fargo. The additional revenue and bonding capacity would allow us to take on a whole host of progressive policies without relying on additional regressive taxes to pay for it.

- Do you support the creation of a city-county authority to address homelessness in Seattle/King County? If so, what steps would you take to support it on county council? If not, why not?

As the true regional governing body, the King County Council has a responsibility to step up to the challenge and lead on our region's homeless crisis. My budget proposals would include additional funding for services related to homelessness in addition to investments in affordable housing. Affordable housing and displacement are extremely important to me. My mother continues to struggle to pay rent and stay in her home despite working double shifts at a nursing home for 20 years. The communities where I was raised in South Seattle have been fully gentrified. Funding and building affordable housing must be a top priority for the King County

Council if we are to address our homelessness crisis. The Council must match the importance of this issue to its budgeting and spending priorities -- it cannot spend \$130 million on financing stadiums while this issue exists. The Council should sell surplus land that it owns to purchasers who commit to building affordable housing. The Council should work with state and local governments to agree on focused, measurable goals for building affordable housing and create clear strategies for achieving those goals as a region. As a county councilmember, I would support having a Central Authority at the county level which would allow the entire region to pool its resources and make focused, coordinated investments in affordable housing. I would also like to see more investments being made in mental health and addiction services at the county level.

- What causes people to experience homelessness in King County?

Increased rents, not being able to afford paying a medical bill, losing a job, living in a city with a booming population and not enough affordable housing, and a whole host of other reasons.

- What specifically should the county do to address racial disparities in housing opportunity?

I believe the county should follow Seattle's lead and introduce legislation requiring landlords to rent to the first qualified applicant that applies. The County should also bolster tenant's knowledge of their rights and educate landlord's about their obligations related to racial equity through workshops and literature. The County should also fight against form of payments discrimination such as Section 8 voucher discrimination. The County should give rent priority to Black and Brown communities being displaced and promote home ownership in these communities through community land trust models and giving low interest loans for home purchases.