



Nilu Jenks Urbanist Questionnaire 2023

Seattle City Council, District 5

What is your preferred Comprehensive Plan housing growth alternative and why?

All of the Comprehensive Plan alternatives attempt to address shortcomings in the current plan, but given our extreme housing shortage, I support the consideration of Alternative 6. Short of that, I would support moving Alternative 5 in the direction of Alternative 6. Only Alternative 6 goes far enough in upzoning not just transit-adjacent and urban village parts of the city, but all single family zoned residential areas, while including displacement protections. Alternative 6 goes beyond the recently passed state zoning laws and upzones to at least 4-story multifamily housing everywhere, which the data show is the minimum required for multifamily projects to be economically viable vs. large luxury single family homes. This will provide a number of benefits:

- More housing throughout the city
- More options for affordable housing not just concentrated near transit and busy arterials
- Increased small retail and other commercial options within neighborhoods (e.g., the return of the corner store)
- Decreased need for transit across long distances within the city
- Reduced displacement, exclusion, and segregation

What investments do we need to make to achieve our housing affordability goals, and what should those goals be? Do you support the Housing Levy?

I support the Housing Levy.

Our goal should be to ensure that everyone can afford and obtain housing. In the medium to long term, this means increasing housing supply to meet the demand of our rapidly growing region so that the market price of housing does not rise so quickly. We can increase supply by reducing barriers to development that past policy choices have imposed including: removing restrictive zoning; improving the historically slow, expensive, and inefficient permitting process; reforming restrictive and unpredictable design review processes; and fixing well-intentioned but



counterproductive affordability programs. For example, the Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) program could be improved by standardizing and simplifying the MHA schedules throughout the city, adjusting affordability requirements so that projects are economically viable everywhere (especially in our current higher interest rate environment), and streamlining the permitting process.

In the short term, and for the subset of the population who will never be able to afford market rate housing, we should continue to make investments to enable those who cannot afford housing to obtain housing. These investments include:

- Rental assistance / housing vouchers. This is by far the most cost-effective approach to keeping people housed (preventing homelessness) and housing those with some but not enough income.
- Public funding to buy and operate below-market housing stock, e.g., funding for the recently passed social housing initiative.
- Offering incentives such as tax breaks or expedited permitting processes to developers interested in developing or converting and operating existing buildings for affordable housing, including converting office space into housing.

Under what circumstances would you support pedestrianizing streets that are currently open to cars?

I would support pedestrianizing many streets that are currently open to cars, subject to being able to service the critical vehicle needs (if any) of businesses or homes on those streets - for example with designated delivery hours and retractable bollards, as many cities throughout the world have successfully done. There are many areas that we can make into beautiful pedestrian community hubs with restaurants and cafes to make them appealing to community members - and data show that pedestrianized streets are wildly popular. For example, I would love to see Pike Place Market and the waterfront pedestrianized. I think we should explore pedestrian corridors leading up to our light rail stops to make getting around the city as pedestrian friendly as possible.

What is your approach to generating progressive revenue for the city?

Washington State has one of the most regressive tax structures in the country, so I would always be open to exploring issues of tax fairness. I believe we need to find



ways to make our tax system more accountable, more transparent, and most importantly, more equitable for Seattle residents. While the options available to Seattle are limited given Washington State constraints, there are options we should explore including a land value tax and a vacancy tax.

What is your position on impact fees?

I am not inclined to support impact fees, because we should be doing everything we can to encourage housing development in our city. That said, we don't want to build without the infrastructure to make density successful and that could mean some impact fees to make it work, but generally structuring those to be paid over many years would be a smaller deterrent to builders. My general position is to be careful about adding hurdles to increased housing supply and density, especially with increasing interest rates already deterring building.

What items do you view as essential to the next Seattle transportation levy due in 2024?

We just saw a disappointing story that Metro is cutting service by 4%. The first step is working with the County to restore all transit service to pre-pandemic levels. As we expand our light rail system, we should also expand bus links. The Light Rail has brought improved access along the North/South corridor, but we must also expand bus routes with increased service to bring people to the Light Rail system along the East/West corridor, i.e. 130th Ave NE. We should also support these transit corridors with safe bike lanes. These changes would be vital to increase utilization of the Light Rail and our public transportation system overall, which will help abate Seattle's increasing traffic congestion, address the challenges of climate change, and meet the needs of our different communities. We need to close gaps in our pedestrian and biking infrastructure and prioritize complete, connected routes to make sure we become a people oriented city, and we need to also include increasing pedestrian and biking safety in those plans. In District 5, Aurora and 130th has the highest number of fatalities in all of Seattle, and this community deserves attention and traffic calming measures in the next transportation levy. Bridge and street auditing and maintenance will also need to be part of our next levy. Finally, the levy will be an important part of helping our city achieve our carbon emission goals and working toward meeting those goals should be evident in the final plan.



Would you vote to approve completing the streetcar network via the Center City extension and work with the mayor to prioritize funding and building it?

Yes, I think the Center City extension is a good way to connect different parts of the city including the sports stadiums, will reduce traffic congestion, and would be useful to tourists. The Center City extension has been estimated to have a high level of ridership and would therefore reduce the number of people opting to drive to and around downtown. As something that was offered to city residents, I also think it's important to get it done and live up to resident expectations.

Under what circumstances are homeless encampment removals appropriate?

Shuffling people around the city is costly and traumatic and does not address where our solutions truly lie: addressing our housing crisis. We should be focusing our resources on increasing shelter capacity and affordable housing. With that said, encampments can present serious public health and safety concerns, such as the spread of infectious diseases, the risk of fire, or even violence. Sweeps should be a last resort tool and only be used when indicated for public health and safety reasons. Additionally, sweeps should only be performed with reasonable advance notification and be attached to housing first initiatives and wraparound services.

Hiring incentives haven't worked so far to attract additional police officers to the Seattle Police Department. How can the City promote public safety in such an environment?

Given the difficulty hiring police officers, and the likely looming city budget deficit, it is critical to view public safety broadly, and define what elements of public safety (e.g., traffic violations or behavioral health issues) can be addressed more effectively and more cheaply than with traditional law enforcement. We should explore and fully implement alternate response models. The Community Safety and Communications Center should be funded and staffed - which will end up saving money. Investing in this program will also help improve our first responder times. This is a statewide challenge, and I would like to see more leadership from the state on hiring, funding, transparency, accountability, and creating alternative response models in every city in the state.



What is the appropriate role for the Seattle Police Department to play in creating public safety in Seattle? What would a police contract that encourages safety look like? What does the next police contract need to have in order to earn your vote of approval?

We must emphasize effective community policing models. We need police officers walking or biking in the community, out of cars, so they are recognizable to people in the neighborhood and build trust as fellow community members. The 2019 Sand Point mass shooting unfolded on my doorstep, and the only people I wanted responding at that time were our police officers. My son and I ran out to help when we heard the car crash, and I believe the responding police officer who got to the end of our driveway at the same time as we did saved our lives that day. With that said, I do not think we need police responding to behavioral health calls or enforcing traffic violations, especially as we need to be improving our first responder call times.

We all know that racial bias (which my family has experienced) and excessive use of force are a reality, so I would vote for a contract that includes a civilian oversight board that has real power, with specific consequences for incidents of racial bias and excessive force, de-escalation training, investment into alternative policing models like LEAD/coLEAD, and support and funding for behavioral response teams when appropriate for some 911 calls.

How can Seattle encourage more people to ride transit?

More people will ride transit if it is comprehensive, timely, frequent, reasonably priced, and comfortable. Currently, the region's transit system is lacking in all of these areas, especially but not limited to East-West connections. The more options available, and the more complete, efficient, and rapid routes we provide, the more people will be willing to leave their cars at home. Specific ideas include:

- Complete, synchronized, and multi-modal routing on heavily trafficked routes such as Lake City to downtown - with frequent buses that connect seamlessly with light rail trains
- More frequent, faster buses and light rail routes (e.g., express trains or more reserved bus lanes)
- Allowing riders to use transfer tickets between multiple agencies, such as King County Metro and Sound Transit
- Cheaper transit passes



- Offering incentives for employer-covered transportation