



Ron Davis Urbanist Questionnaire 2023

Seattle City Council, District 4

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

"Option 6!" For me, that means allowing European levels of moderately dense mid-rise housing everywhere and commercial uses that cover most daily needs, at FARs that support broad housing supply growth and frequent transit access. We should legalize more intensive uses in areas with public amenities like light rail stations, parks, schools, and libraries, or major commercial zones. We need to aggressively invest in affordable housing and social housing in high opportunity, currently exclusive, neighborhoods, ensuring that people have affordable access to better life prospects. We need to do the same to reduce displacement in historically marginalized neighborhoods facing gentrification pressure, and to avoid concentrated poverty, and we need to bring parks and other public goods to these neighborhoods.

Our transportation and land use policies go hand in hand. We must radically reallocate our right of way, especially busy and dangerous arterials, and make it as easy, fast, convenient, safe, and comfortable to get around without a car as it is with one - no matter age or ability.

Why? The rent is too damn high, homelessness is a housing problem, desegregation, economic vitality, GHG emissions, physical safety, livability and climate justice.

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, and I think we should go further by supplementing it with more progressive revenue.

In the public sector, we need to aggressively invest in affordable housing, social housing, permanent supportive housing, housing vouchers, and also tiny homes to bridge the gap while we build permanent housing. The funding needs are immense,



so I've floated more ambitious funding mechanisms in the past (including an auction model I wrote about in the pages of the Urbanist).

Other investments are related to preventing displacement: funding renter representation and inspection, enacting anti-rent gouging trigger bills, experimenting with an anti-rent gouging excise tax, and using right to return ordinances in communities with high displacement risks to push development toward traditionally exclusionary neighborhoods or to provide housing for those who would otherwise be displaced.

Other investments are regulatory, related to supply and cost cutting: changing land use code to enable supply, eliminating all parking minimums and design review, creating a single track permitting process with fewer discretionary elements, expanding staffing for permitting, putting a time maximum on permitting with a builder's remedy, allowing mass timber construction at higher levels and liberalizing mid rise single-stair construction etc.

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

Many more than we currently do!

It's obvious we should start right now with Pike Place Market. But other major gathering spaces with historic, attractive retail, like the Ave or downtown Ballard, seem like obvious candidates. As should areas near significant natural beauty (Lake Washington Boulevard, should have done so with the waterfront as well—and should find ways to claw some of that space back). And, while I don't think we can allow for a local veto, I do think it is important in cases where there are people or businesses that believe they will suffer economically because of the pedestrianization, that we use a mix of engagement, education and mitigation to build support. Businesses that rely heavily on delivery services do need an alternate way to get their services out, for instance - through alley access, etc. But on the whole, I think we should be pedestrianizing many, many more spaces, and turning other areas into virtually pedestrianized spaces (e.g., Barcelona style Superblocks.).

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



First, consider how much the tax raises versus cost to administer, in addition to its redistributive effects. It is best if it is relatively resilient during economic swings.

Next consider legal risk; will the courts strike it down and is it a promising avenue for the courts to open up options for new kinds of progressive taxes. I'd also consider whether it's likely to build momentum for a progressive majority, and try and avoid any perverse impacts.

For now, we should expand JumpStart. Second, levy an excise tax on parking, with higher rates for open lots, parking in transit rich areas, and new parking. Third, we can enact a vacant homes tax. While this only raises marginal revenue and adds few homes to the market, I do think it is a small net positive and is key towards coalition-building in pursuit of other ambitious legislation. Finally, we need to pass a 1% income tax with a flat, standard rebate. The rebate should be severable if it is struck down (so worst case, we have a flat tax, better than almost all our other taxes). I've expounded in an article in Stranger "Seattle Needs Money."

What is your position on impact fees?

They are perverse, raising the cost of supplying a good with significant positive environmental, economic, and social justice externalities. Given the analysis Urban3 has done on more intensive land use, I think we can comfortably say property taxes already accomplish the ostensible purpose of such fees.

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

I'd like to see 5 minute peak frequencies on the most utilized routes, and generally increasing all bus frequencies so more people in this city live within walking distance of very frequent transit. We should fulfill the Move Seattle BRT promises, especially in neighborhoods with marginalized populations. We should set "shall" instructions for corridors that must convert general traffic lanes into bus only lanes, even beyond BRT corridors.

We need to build more safe, non-auto facilities. We need to fund Vision Zero by narrowing crossings, raising and signaling crosswalks, adding mid-block crossings



on long blocks, rapidly expanding our no-right-turn-on-red conversion, reducing lane width, and adding visual and physical variety and barriers.

We can aim for free transit for everyone, but at the very last, need to expand it to everyone under 25, to seniors, and to everyone who qualifies for Orca lift. Although I would prioritize mode shift over electrification (because a bigger GHG impact), I'd like to fund electrification as well (federal funding for electrification is more likely).

Finally, we need to make significant investments in our workforce, including higher wages, to ensure we have the talent we need to keep our transit infrastructure humming.

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.

Under what circumstances are homeless encampment removals appropriate?

The time to clear an encampment is when we can offer real, safe, personal space to people in housing. The good news is, when we offer something even as paltry as a tiny home with a few weeks of outreach in advance, we see something like 90% voluntary uptake from people living in parks. This means that we don't need to rely on sweeps to clear parks - we need to rely on housing and offering real solutions.

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?

We can do a lot to make this city safer, and we're certainly doing too little. That means investing in prevention through structural policies that change people's life prospects like providing housing people can afford in high-opportunity and resource rich neighborhoods, supporting evidence-based community violence intervention programming, and providing direct support for families and young people in need. It means sending the right responder to a crisis, which means we have to scale up a behavioral health crisis response as Albuquerque has. This will mean fewer bad interactions between police and those with behavioral issues and more time for



police to address more acute crises and to investigate sexual assaults. All crisis responders, including police, must also be directly accountable to robust civilian oversight, which is the hallmark of good governance, is more likely to protect people's civil rights, and might even rebuild trust between the community and its officers. Finally, we need to engage in science-based rehabilitative practices - which are much better at preventing future crimes.

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?

I've seen a glimmer of hope in that we have been making some progress with our contracts with the King County Police Officer's guild and SPMA, and the ordinances we have passed in Seattle and King County show there is broad support for more serious reform.

For me, the most important change we can make is full civilian oversight. That means a civilian-only, independent oversight body, that has unfettered access to records, subpoena power, disciplinary control, and the right to make criminal referrals. This is basic good governance - it's why CEOs have boards, the President has Congress and Courts, the military has the President and the Secretary of Defense, why prosecutors have independent discretion, etc. It's time to bring our policing into the modern era and out of the age of unaccountable impunity. That's not anti-policing - it's simply pro rule of law.

How can Seattle encourage more people to ride transit?



It has to be frequent, fast, reliable, affordable, safe, and relatively comfortable (which for many people also means clean), and it has to go where people want to go without too many transfers. And it has to be perceived as such.

I think the plans I've outlined above - for increasing frequency, speed, for handing over right of way, for improving public safety, and for further subsidizing riders, as well as for providing the density to support the tax base and ridership - are the exact recipe for delivering on this.