



Shea Wilson Urbanist Questionnaire 2023

Seattle City Council, District 6

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

The 6-plex law recently passed by the state legislature removes much leeway for considering alternatives. Local government now is left to respond to the inevitable demands on infrastructure to accommodate a tripling or quadrupling of Seattle's population. Having waded into local zoning, I believe the state should help fund the required infrastructure expansions. Density is good for the environment, but only with adequate infrastructure. We should not view density itself as a panacea, however, else San Francisco and New York would be paradises. The concept of walkable, mixed use neighborhoods (i.e., urban villages on a more robust scale) must ultimately be our goal.

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? *

Our housing affordability crisis, which affects broad segments of our society, is a natural defect in our capitalist system. If you consider the basic supply and demand curve model taught in introductory economics courses, the area where there is high demand for low-cost widgets never gets adequate supply. Market "efficiency" seeks the optimal price where the supply and demand curves cross. It's one thing when you're talking about widgets, quite another when you're talking about a fundamental need like housing. Because capitalism is not on the ballot, we must acknowledge we are talking about subsidy, not investment. And sustained subsidy (whether in the form of cash or physical plant) is the answer to affordability. At the same time, we have to consider realistically what we are subsidizing. Attempting to afford each person the opportunity, if they want it, to live in their own single-occupant residence



may not be realistic. We have to spend our subsidy dollars wisely to house the greatest number possible.

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

We need to rethink our urban cores. To the extent we can improve traffic flows with one-way rings around urban cores, those urban cores can become areas with significantly slowed traffic, along with some street closures. I believe Ballard provides an excellent opportunity for such an approach, which I call the Ballard Ring. Heading west on Market, I would route traffic north on 20th, west on 56th, south on 24th continuing to Shilshole, then east on Vernon and back north on 20th to complete the Ring. The one-way ring should have at least 3 lanes at all times. Within the core, all traffic would flow on one-way streets, in the instance of Ballard, north on 22nd and Ballard Ave, then back south on Leary, with back-in angle parking or restaurant occupancy of streetscapes. Market would be mostly closed between 20th and 24th. If you then make 17th and Leary one-way north toward Ballard from the area of the Ballard Bridge, you could then safely route the Burke-Gilman in a protected lane through the heart of Ballard. No at-grade pedestrian or bicycle crossing of the Ring would be permitted; access to the core would be through 4 portal underpasses. We would prove the concept, and then look for other urban cores where it would work, too.

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

We should not overtax any particular segment of our tax base, because that is not sustainable. We rely heavily on sales tax, and our reliance on property taxes is nearing a breaking point, particularly given the lack of transparency to renters of the cost of property taxes. One tax that is clearly missing from our tool kit is an income tax. Will the state supreme court revisit whether income is "property"? It declined to



do so in the case of a capital gains tax. We have to be careful how we structure taxes to avoid perverse incentives. For example, given the rise of telecommuting, how do we define where an employee works (in the case of a head tax)? Or where the employer is based? If you say it is where substantial office space is leased, are you creating an incentive for downtown exodus by tech businesses? Ideally we would get some kind of a progressive income-based tax, because that offers one of the best ways to minimize perverse incentives.

What is your position on impact fees?*

As addressed in the response to the first question, infrastructure improvements must occur. Impact fees are one way to fund them, and seem to make sense given that the new construction creates the demand for the additional infrastructure needed. The downside of such fees is that they undermine affordability goals. And that leads us back into a discussion of subsidy, part of which I do believe should come from the state, because it mandated local zoning rules. Assuming such a subsidy, reasonable impact fees—proportionate to the proposed market (or lower subsidized) price or rental for the proposed housing unit—make sense.

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

Link Light Rail (which I understand is regional, not Seattle-specific) is the most essential transportation mode to fund. We should make sure our real property tax base can withstand another vote for light rail should that be necessary. Within Seattle, I would prioritize expanded and more reliable bus service over any other mode.

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?*



I must say I have had my doubts regarding the efficacy of the streetcar network. Is it actually a necessary mode for the way our residents commute? Or is it a curio for tourists, much like San Francisco's cable cars? Given its at-grade location, does it truly accomplish anything that buses could not? But we are now down the road on it, having built two of the three legs. The piece that can pick up Pike Place Market visitors and cruise ship tourists is the one we have not built. Given that we have one of the less resilient downtowns nationwide due to telecommuting, I believe it ultimately makes sense to build the final link and see if it draws people up off the waterfront into other areas of our city.

Under what circumstances are homeless encampment removals appropriate?*

The City of Seattle should designate urban campgrounds, small in size (no more than 20 sites per campground), with portable toilets, raised platforms for tents, garbage disposal and screened for resident privacy. We should have three types of urban campgrounds, according to the social environment a resident wants: sober; intermediate (cannabis/alcohol); and permissive (hard drug use OK). Open hard drug use outside of a permissive urban campground should be criminalized and enforced. By allowing residents to choose their environment, service providers should be able to focus resources more precisely, and residents would be less likely to frustrate relationship-building by moving. Particularly with substance-dependent residents, hopefully relationships can be built to encourage a self-motivated desire for treatment of addiction, because compulsory treatment will almost always fail. With such alternatives available to encampment residents—as a coping mechanism until indoor housing is available (note even KCRHA says this will take 5 years)—I would support removals to an urban campground with a social environment of the resident's choice.



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?*

The current state of the police force is a direct outgrowth of the votes taken to defund the police. Any objective observer could see—at the time—that more resources were necessary to provide ongoing de-escalation training and a culture shift. Instead we got a reclassification of parking enforcement and threats of further budget cuts. The chief quit, and hundreds of officers followed her out the door. A new council comprised of councilmembers who have not voted to defund would go a long way to rebuilding trust with the police community. To get to your question, though, how can a police officer be in two or three places at the same time? Simple. They can't. Right now we are in triage mode, and violent crime must take precedence. There is no silver bullet. The approach of City Attorney Davison to bundle multiple lower-level crimes into a felony and refer them to King County is one start. But the needs of addicts to "raise" money to support their habits means we are in for a lot more theft and other property crime directed at our small businesses, who often do not have the resources to spend on security, until such time as our police force is restored to an appropriate size. 1400 officers may not be enough to reverse the laissez-faire attitude to theft that has taken hold.

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?*

The very fundamental issue here is that police-community adverse incidents that result in a complaint require adjudication through a process subject ultimately to civilian control. That is the only way the public will have confidence that the process is fair and transparent. Soldiers do not get to bargain over the Uniform Code of



Military Justice. Being issued a weapon and taking on the authority to use deadly force is an awesome responsibility. An officer should respect that those ceding that right expect accountability. We should also make far more extensive use of community service officers, and their roles should be expanded from focusing on crisis intervention. Unarmed neighborhood-based CSOs who live in the community could have a soothing effect on tensions before they develop into a full-blown confrontation. We need to stop thinking that only people with certain degrees are qualified to be CSOs. Sometimes the best person for the job is the one who has practical knowledge of a neighborhood and credibility with the constituency, not one with theoretical training.

How can Seattle encourage more people to ride transit?*

One thing our transit system needs to do better is to plan to respond to expected demand surges. For example, following sporting events or large concerts. These events frequently let out at times when transit is in off-peak modes. For many, transit rides home or to a park-and-ride are one of the few times they take transit. If they have to wait for off-peak service, this opportunity to make a great impression and encourage riding again is squandered. Instead, we should plan peak-service surges for such events, as a way to entice folks to try transit again. One factor contributing to lower ridership is actually a success story: telecommuting. The central-city focus of the transit network is challenged by the relative lack of demand for central-city commuting. So we need more transit to where people want to go. Now, the problem here is we do not know if central-city work, and thus commuting, will return. But a focus on cross-town traffic as well as central-city routes will be important, particularly as our population grows and the city becomes more dense. And without belaboring the obvious, reliability must improve and people need to feel safe on transit, whether it's recovering from the legacy of COVID, avoiding open drug use or concern about personal safety.

