



## **Claudia Balducci Urbanist Questionnaire 2023**

King County Council, District 6

**Would you vote to put a countywide transportation benefit district geared at boosting Metro transit service on the ballot, as had been proposed in 2020?**

Yes, as one of the small group of people who organized the proposal in 2020, and the chair of King County's Transportation Benefit District, I would help create that initiative, vote to put it on the ballot and work to pass it.

**As a King County Councilmember, there's a chance you'd be tapped to be on the Sound Transit Board of Directors. Would you seek such an assignment and how would you use such authority to improve outcomes? \***

I have served on the Sound Transit Board as an incumbent King County Councilmember and previously as a Bellevue City Council member. I am the current Chair of Sound Transit's system expansion committee. I'm proud to have been recognized as a "Transit Champion" by Transportation Choices Coalition, largely due to my service on the Sound Transit Board, and as a "Public Sector Housing Champion" by the Housing Development Consortium, partially because of the transit-connected housing work we have done at Sound Transit. In my current term, I have fought to make Sound Transit more rider-focused and worked to improve our ability to deliver on the promise of our voter-approved transit capital programs. If re-elected, I will continue to make these top priorities, including using my position to implement the recommendations of the Technical Advisory Group, building more of a rider perspective into our planning and operations work, and continuing to bring my own perspective as a regular transit rider to the Board. Among other things, Sound Transit needs to improve reliability in opening new service, and improve rider experience including public information, station amenities, cleanliness and safety.



**What do you view as the top priorities for King County Metro over the next five years? How would you work to solve Metro's bus operator shortage? \***

Transit is a key to mobility, access to opportunity, avoiding the worst of the climate crisis and advancing racial equity and our economy. I have been privileged to work in the transit field when Metro was the fastest growing agency in the country, winning awards and innovating in many ways, including on centering racial equity and economic justice in our work. The next term will be a rebuilding period, and it is critical that we do this well. First, we must re-establish schedule reliability at a very high level - people will not ride if buses don't come when expected. Once reliability is established, we must chart a path back to growth, and expand our system based on the principles set out in the Metro Connects long range plan: more emphasis on all-day service and connections that enable a much wider variety of trips, cleanliness and safety throughout the system, continued emphasis on accessible fares and fare media (making good on the promise of ORCA next gen) and electrification of the bus system. I will also continue to work towards excellent, equitable TOD, which is a key strategy for transportation, opportunity and affordable housing. None of this will be possible without filling our labor shortage, both in the Transit Operator workforce, but also for mechanics and other key roles. Some of the hiring challenge seems to be a legitimate shift in demographics, with more people leaving the workforce or moving to other jobs. Although the County Council explicitly is prohibited from engaging in labor negotiations, we must conclude a contract with our largest union (ATU) that once again makes us the most regionally competitive employer. My role will be to budget the funds to support such a contract, and I will do so. Beyond wages, hours and working conditions, we also must continue to partner with labor, technical and other educational institutions to build the workforce of the future. We are moving in this direction with our very promising Green Jobs Initiative. We can no longer assume, "if you post it, they will apply."



**Do you support redeveloping King County's campus in Downtown Seattle as proposed by County Executive Dow Constantine? What would be your primary goals in such a redevelopment? \***

I do support redeveloping and revitalizing the King County campus. The buildings are aging and unhealthy, and will require hundreds of millions of dollars in investment just to keep them going. I would rather see us invest in modern, upgraded facilities (retaining some of the historical aspects of the campus, such as the courthouse) with the opportunity to build significant new affordable housing, retain green space, and connect to the wealth of transportation facilities in the area (light rail, 3rd avenue busway, protected bike lanes on 2nd and 4th Avenues, etc). However, I do not believe that we MUST site a new light rail station under the current Administration Building to do all of that. I believe we should determine the location of the new CID light rail station based on a number of factors: (1) which location creates the best ridership experience and system connections; (2) ability to limit impacts to and provide the best service and connections to residents and businesses in the CID itself (this is a challenging conversation around equity in a historically mistreated and underserved community, with important considerations and tradeoffs in multiple directions); (3) ability to deliver the station including costs, constructability, etc.

**Recent state legislation will substantially impact residential zoning in much of King County. What role if any should the county have in supporting and shaping equitable development? \***

The county has a responsibility to support and shape equitable development for our people. We should have a proactive and hands-on role that ultimately helps support communities with policy initiatives, regulations, and funds that alleviate residential issues and strengthen the county and make housing available to all. Currently, we fulfill this role in a few key ways: 1. Regulatory role: For example, King County has



authority to set county-wide planning policies that cities (and the County) must meet in adopting their comprehensive plans. In my time at King County Council, I spearheaded a housing initiative which has resulted in a proposed update to our countywide planning policies, to set very ambitious numerical goals for cities and the county to accommodate housing affordability at every level of income, in their comprehensive plans and land use codes. to require cities and the county to plan for housing affordability at all levels in all jurisdictions in their next comprehensive plans. This proposal has passed the Growth Management Planning Council (unanimously) and when fully adopted will represent a sea change in how we shape land use for housing for many years to come.

2. Convening: In addition to our limited regulatory authority, King County often acts as a convenor, bringing together our partner cities and others. I am a big believer in the power of collaboration and regionalism, and the above accomplishment with regard to housing planning stemmed directly from an initiative I sponsored starting with a Regional Affordable Housing Task Force in 2017 - 2018 that was a collaboration of our county and representatives of all KC cities. I also founded and continue to chair a multi-sector Affordable Housing Committee where public and private sector interests come together to recommend and take actions to improve housing access. These kinds of convenings can drive real results.

3. Technical and financial support: In the coming years, the County will be in a position to support planning and implementation of housing policy and land use in cities throughout King County. We can and should also step in to help coordinate model codes that could streamline the provision of housing. Given my background in city government, and my longstanding work in regional collaboration (I just finished two terms as President of the Puget Sound Regional Council) and my willingness to always drive for improvement, I believe I am very well positioned to work with our regional partners to achieve results.

**Historically, King County has often opted to contract with community-based organizations to provide social services (such as rental assistance, diversion services, etc). What do you think of this approach? \***



Many governments are set up this way: King County Department of Community and Human Services is largely a contracting organization. So is Sound Transit. So is the King County Regional Homelessness Authority. It can be a very functional and equitable way to provide services -- with the government providing funding, goals, accountability and organizational support, and community-based organizations that are closest to those they serve working directly with their community members. This pairs resources and administrative expertise on the one hand with cultural competency, subject-matter expertise, human connections and self-determination on the other. We've seen examples of this model working very well; and also the contrary. I believe the key to success is to maintain vigilance and commitment to performance, while always being open to learning from and supporting our community partners and to changing direction when necessary.

**Seattle remains the primary funder of the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) while other cities in the region do not contribute directly. Do you support increasing funding to the KCRHA and, if so, how? \***

I was on the Council when we voted to create the KCRHA and believe it has lived up to its promise in two key regards: First, acknowledging homelessness is a regional problem that requires a regional response. Too often, it is wrongly concluded that homelessness is a "Seattle" problem and our job outside Seattle is to keep it away. Second, that we must center lived experience in our plans, programs and services if they are to have the intended impact of helping people move from homelessness to housing. Clearly, KCRHA has a long way to go to fully meet its mission. It must show value and results, building trust in other jurisdictions beyond KC, Seattle and a small contribution from a coalition of north end cities. We must locate other sources of funding - at all levels of government and from private and foundation partners - to meet the scale of the need. I do support initiatives and funding that are needed to help continue and complete that mission, as long as they align with the budget and values of King County holistically. In the near term, we should be able to bring in



support from other partner jurisdictions, along with state support and federal reimbursement dollars.

**In 2018, the King County Affordable Housing Task Force [reported](#) that the County needs about a quarter million net new affordable homes by 2040 to address the housing affordability crisis. Since then we're nowhere near that trajectory. How can the County boost affordable housing production? \***

This is my task force! I created the concept, sponsored the motion that created it and served as co-chair. At the end of our work, we set a goal of 44,000 net new affordable homes by 2024, along with a lengthy list of recommended strategies to meet that goal. As of the most recent data (2021), we had achieved only about 8% of that goal. Although this progress is obviously slow, since we began our work and advocacy, we have seen changes in policy like HB 1110 and the Countywide Planning Policy affordability goals for comprehensive plans (discussed above) that will start to dramatically increase housing availability and variety. Similarly, I support the recent proposal from Rep. DelBene and Sen. Cantwell to increase the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit program which, if passed, would effectively double the amount of subsidized housing that could be created for the lower levels of affordability. Our regional collaborative that grew out of the Task Force has been a force for much of this positive change, for example, agreeing to a set of "funding principles" which we have used to bolster positive action at a large scale by the state especially. We have also created a housing dashboard that helps to make our efforts and outcomes more transparent, encouraging continued efforts on all of our efforts to boost affordable housing production.

**What are your top public health priorities for your potential term?\***

Everyone deserves to live in a safe and healthy community with equitable access to education and opportunity. The top public health crises of our time, in my view, are



behavioral health and addiction as we see overdoses and deaths increase alarmingly; along with the crisis in lack of emergency housing, long-term housing and associated services, leading to intractable and unacceptable levels of homelessness. My top public health priorities for my potential term are: Housing access and quality, access to healthcare, including behavioral health and addiction treatment, support for youth and families (including mental health), and addressing the homelessness crisis.

**How would you work to eliminate jail deaths in King County facilities?\***

As a former employee and director of the County jail system, I have worked successfully in the past to reform jail procedures and services to improve health care, provide better services to inmates with mental illnesses, improve suicide prevention and reduce uses of force in our jails. The strategies that worked then need to evolve to meet current conditions. People who would have been in jail years ago for minor offenses, are largely no longer being arrested with the result that the jail population is sicker, more medically fragile, more likely to have drug addiction/risk of overdose, and thus more likely to have major medical and/or self-harm risk while in jail. I'm glad our County's auditor's office issued a recent report with recommendations to improve jail safety, including better training, safer behavior management/disciplinary approaches, completing the upgrades to cells to make them more suicide resistant. In addition, we need to right size our work force to the level of population -- by filling vacancies and by using jail only for those people and cases that require this severity of intervention. With regular jail operations, people in custody are able to be out of their cells more often, able to maintain visitation and contact with the outside world and able to be seen more by corrections, medical and program staff. All of this lends itself to a safer environment. Ultimately, I support the investments the County is building in so-called "upstream" efforts - education, housing, job opportunities, human services - which help people to stay or get out of



the criminal legal system entirely. A person who is never in jail is never at risk of being harmed or dying in jail.