



Rocco DeVito Urbanist Questionnaire 2025

Burien City Council, Seat 7

What are your top three priorities to achieve in your term?

Safe streets: We lack sidewalks in most areas and more so in lower-income, recently annexed neighborhoods. With our small budget, large sidewalk projects are unlikely, and I think we should focus on greenways. These greenways would primarily connect schools, parks and community amenities. More details in the appropriate question below. Housing: I'd like our council to reduce the remaining barriers to building housing, see the last question on our comprehensive plan for details. Budget/service: Burien is going into a budget squeeze and needs additional revenue since there is little left to cut. There is likely to be a levy lid lift on the November ballot for public safety, which will stabilize the budget by covering some higher costs for police and insurance. It would also fund our co-responder program that is losing its grant. Some councilors would like us to also bank some of these funds to create our own police department. I would work to pass a levy lid lift if it hasn't happened by the time I'm elected, oppose creating a police department, and move funds to services for youth and homelessness programs.

How will you boost housing options, particularly for families of all incomes to live where they work? How will you engage the public for new shelters, transitional housing, emergency housing, permanent supportive housing? How do you weigh community objections with the housing goals for your jurisdiction, while encouraging engagement from neighbors?

We need the appropriate minimum wage, renter protections and rent stabilization policies to prevent folks from losing their homes or being displaced. We also need to



increase transit options so there is the option to save money by reducing or eliminating car expenses. I was able to afford a mortgage only because I was able to go car-free. We can also create the conditions/incentives for workforce housing.

Confronting homelessness will require a large amount of transparency, education, and discussion. In Burien emotions are high on this issue and have led to an erosion of trust in government and service providers, fairly or not. As a city we can work on small-scale emergency shelter, including a long-term sanctioned and subsidized tiny home village on public land and some sort of sanctioned tent encampment. We will need to work with partners, service providers, and volunteers to get the word out and accommodate work schedules and language barriers.

We will need to work with our neighbors, region, and state to fund housing and mental health services for emergency shelter, PSH, and mental health facilities. I would work with nearby cities on funding and placement for mental health facilities and funding emergency shelters.

Do you support adding progressive revenue sources? Which ones would you support to fund your priorities? Or what cuts would you make to balance budgets facing increasing strain under Trump?

Yes I support progressive revenue options and would like the State to increase capital gains taxes and finally pursue an income tax. Ideally it would allow for some reduction in sales tax to provide some relief to low and middle income households. Locally we have and will need to rely on property taxes to maintain or grow our services without changes at the state level. We have very little left to cut and costs are going up (esp staffing, subscriptions, and insurance).



Other revenue could come from encouraging more types of businesses to open or move to Burien so we are less reliant on sales tax from our car dealerships (our largest generator of sales tax). Arts and culture, and medical research/services would be the most likely to grow fastest given our current conditions. We should also hire grant staff, which we currently do not have, to increase our competitiveness, and the number of applications/grants we can process and maintain.

Overall if we are going to get financial stability and actually tackle housing and homelessness we need progressive taxation end of story.

What do you think is the most important strategy your jurisdiction can pursue to limit cost increases and make the region affordable to live in? How would you go about implementing that strategy?

I've covered a bunch of strategies in other sections that play a role here. But the most important things we could do is to build more housing and limit rent increases where possible. We're not going to lower prices without more units.

Our comprehensive plan keeps naturally occurring affordable housing from being redeveloped to make sure we limit displacement, and zones areas of cultural or community significance differently to make sure development is done right and in conjunction with community needs. We should retain those policies so we don't lose what makes our city special and a place all kinds of people want to see.

With proper funding, I'd love for us to explore affordable housing projects, such as a theater/affordable housing project at the transit center. We should also work with grocery stores to redevelop land in the car-centric 1st Ave corridor with housing above stores (like we've seen in Queen Anne and elsewhere).



Traffic deaths are rising across Washington state, with pedestrians composing an increasing share statewide. What is your approach to making our streets safer for all users?

We need to be deliberate in how we approach public works programs both to increase safety and efficacy, especially with the current federal situation. Burien needs to make sure we incorporate walking/rolling infrastructure into any large street repaving or repair. We also need to have traffic calming requirements on our largest and most dangerous streets including medians, bump outs, and traffic cameras at key intersections and schools. Camera fees would help fund additional safety improvements. Lastly, we should have clear standards for accessibility and access so that people of every ability can get around safely. Where we don't have sidewalks I'd like to see a network of greenways. Parking studies show that we have ample parking in just about all neighborhoods and I'd like to ban parking on one side of the select street for paths. I'd like to see partial or full extruded curbs to protect the path and prevent parking and cement planters to create roundabouts. With the layouts of our schools, parks, pedestrian bridges, and community amenities, connecting them would create a solid network throughout the city.

What is your approach to improving public safety over the next five years? How will you actualize it?

I think one of the unfortunate things in Burien is that visible homelessness has become the indicator of "public safety" for many people in our town. Crime is down in Burien, and has been headed that way for at least the last two years, so there is a difference between public safety and perception. We are lucky that our first responders and service providers are great partners, so we are starting strong. Our first responders are all in on diversion and mental health approaches. We have a co-responder program and just



need to find funding. Both chiefs want to grow teams to have 24h coverage providing mental health and services to those who need them, housed or unhoused. I'd also like to make sure we have enough police to have more of a presence where they are asked for and needed, like our Alcove Apartment complex to combat gang and drug violence. I'd also like to see us invest in infrastructure like greenways and streetlights to help people be and feel safer at all hours. Finally, we need to fund youth, housing, and homelessness programs, all of which I talk about elsewhere and are upstream solutions to public safety issues.

How have federal funding cuts impacted your jurisdiction and how do you plan to address those impacts?

While we are still waiting for the full effects of the changes at the federal level, we can be certain that people in my city will feel effects from cuts to HHS, HUD, SNAP, and more. We need to ensure that we advocate and pass funding for King County Public health at the County and State level, we will need a well funded local public health organization to help folks who will lose medical coverage. We will also need rental protections and funding to keep people in their homes, especially the most vulnerable, including seniors.

To some extent, unfairly, we will need to rely on each other and the community as well to fill gaps. From volunteering at food banks, to helping feed our neighbors, we will need to help each other through what is likely to be a tough time. As a city councilor I should play a key role assisting/connecting organizations and people to volunteer and advocacy opportunities.



As a State we should raise progressive revenue to fill the gaps but also go beyond that and hopefully chip away at the unfunded work we still need to do around housing and mental health services.

What are your views on the SeaTac Sustainable Airport Master Plan and how will it impact your jurisdiction? What plans do you have to address the impacts of the airport on your community?

When it comes to SeaTac and the Port of Seattle, the surrounding communities need them to contribute to programs to combat air and noise pollution. If they have \$5 billion to build lounges and renovate terminals they have money to help their community with sound insulation and health programs. The Port should/continue to advocate and/or fund cleaner and alternative fuels to lessen air pollution. They can also work with state and county officials to lobby congress for more support. Concerns will only increase with the predicted growth of passengers going through SeaTac.

I also acknowledge that some of this growth is dictated by the federal government and not in the Port of Seattle's control. It is also a huge economic driver for our region, and source of many local jobs. And while we could reduce flights it will likely just move them to another new greenfield airport which also seems unwise. We can do things in WA to manage this growth over the long term and we should start now. We could improve local and regional transit so that air travel to Portland, Vancouver, and out through Spokane are unnecessary, helping to reduce the overall need for flights.

King County has good policies and codes designed to protect agricultural, forest and rural lands, including our natural areas, waterways, and small rural communities.

However, these policies and codes are too often not upheld and enforced. How will you ensure that rural lands are protected, and that violators are subject to enforcement?



We need to tighten up our Urban Growth Boundaries and focus on building denser housing in all cities in the County. We can't continue to allow housing growth to be tract housing replacing forests in the rural parts of our area. Building more housing in cities is a big part of keeping rural areas clean and accessible. Programs that trade increased density for protecting green space in rural areas should be more available as well. We also need to make sure we are properly funding current efforts from the County to do wastewater monitoring, education, and enforcement. Many smaller businesses or farms may not know that they are out of compliance, or how to get there. We should make every effort to connect them to resources and assistance (financial and technical) to become compliant before enforcement. If enforcement becomes necessary we need to make sure those staff are available to keep everyone honest and pursue actions when necessary. If we don't have enough staff we aren't doing what needs to be done to keep our green spaces healthy.

Do you support camping bans or sweeps? If elected, how would you adapt or change current law/policies to protect and support our neighbors?

I do not support Burien's camping ban. I believe we should remove any punishments stemming from someone's lack of housing or overnight tent placement. I do believe we need some sensible restrictions on camping on certain properties or near certain locations, such as schools or critical areas. If we are to do anything more restrictive, prior to adequate shelter being available in the region, it needs to be paired with viable alternative spaces such as sanctioned tiny homes/encampments and RV/car lots equipped with appropriate utilities and services. I also believe strongly in our co-responder program which helps first responders to connect vulnerable people to services if they seem to be heading toward a crisis and get them the support they need. We should also have ample diversion programs for those who do commit less serious crimes so they have the opportunity to get on their feet.



In what ways could your city's comprehensive plan go further, and what would you push for to improve it during your tenure?

We thankfully have a pretty good comprehensive plan, so changes are not as heavy a lift. We should not just reduce but eliminate parking minimums to help support affordable housing and increase housing units. We also need to do more to remove barriers to housing by relaxing rules on setbacks and design standards.

Wherever possible we should make permitting easier and work with other jurisdictions to harmonize permitting (rules and systems) to make it easier to build things. We can also relax environmental review for select projects (like affordable housing and transit projects) to reduce building timelines and legal hurdles.

I'd also like us to pursue some zoning changes to encourage arts and culture uses in our creative district, and a medical district to create more opportunities to expand the healthcare sector near the hospital. Which could help us to attract businesses, but also encourage existing medical and dental businesses in the Ambaum corridor to move, freeing up prime spots for dense housing in a RapidRide corridor.