



## **Barbara de Michele Urbanist Questionnaire 2025**

Issaquah City Council, Position 3

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

Affordable housing, transportation improvements, human services expansion

**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?**

A recent community survey showed "growth and development planning" and "affordable housing" were peoples' second highest priorities (following "traffic flow improvements" at number one). I propose to make it easier to construct housing in Issaquah by: 1) expanding middle housing to the entire city (currently, only allowed in specific neighborhoods); lowering parking requirements; adopting blanket MFTE (currently only available on specific projects); and simplifying the permitting process.

I am proud of my vote to capture the .1% sales tax (HB1590). Issaquah has used this fund to hire homelessness outreach specialists, to support a Transit Oriented Development project that will provide 180 units of 40% to 60% AMI housing; to contribute funds to ARCH, and, recently, to authorize a new supportive housing project located in downtown Issaquah.

I want to work more closely with developers to ensure that our Title 18 regulations are practical and realistic in today's highly volatile economic environment. I have



proposed establishing a Development Technical Advisory Committee along the lines of the City of Bellevue's developers' advisory group.

As shown by the community survey, Issaquah residents are generally receptive to new housing development. The council always strives to be transparent in our decision-making. In our most recent retreat, we spent considerable time discussing communications strategies that will further enable community engagement and understanding.

**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?**

I support progressive revenue sources. The City of Issaquah advocated strongly for lifting the 1% property tax increase cap imposed on municipalities and counties. Unfortunately, the legislature did not adopt that change and instead raised a number of sales tax and gasoline taxes, all of them regressive. In addition, the legislature provided cities with a City Benefit District (CBD) sales tax option, which is also regressive. It was very disappointing.

It is probably unrealistic, in a city our size, to impose a wealth tax on individuals or an employee head tax for major corporations. I would advocate for the legislature and Governor to adopt measures that address imbalances in Washington State's tax structure.

The City of Issaquah faced budget shortfalls prior to Donald Trump's inauguration, due to significant losses of sales tax and real estate excise tax revenues. As we adopted the 2025-2026 biennial budget, the council trimmed 28 staff positions, road and sidewalk maintenance budgets, and imposed an across-the-board 6% cut in all



departments except public safety. In Trump's first few months, we are already contemplating major adjustments to the recently adopted budget. I have forcefully advocated for maintaining human services (food, shelter support) at status quo levels amid a "shared sacrifice" overall approach. As a member of the council's Mobility Committee, I am reviewing significant proposed cuts to long-desired road improvement projects.

**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?**

As outlined in the answer to the first question, the most urgent and strategic thing we can do to lower costs overall is to lower the cost of housing. The Puget Sound Regional Council says that the region will need 800,000 additional housing units by 2050, and today nearly 50% of the people in King County are cost-burdened by housing expenses. We can address this need by building housing sized for all needs: apartments, condos, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes and other "plexes," ADUs, mixed-use housing, cottages, and, yes, single family homes where appropriate. Again, as outlined in the first question, I and other members of the council have been pursuing a number of strategies to encourage and incentivize home building in Issaquah.

We can also boost alternative transportation -- transit, walking, biking, e-scooters and e-bikes. Unfortunately, the cost of housing often makes commuting almost inevitable. However, that said, reducing car ownership, introducing electric vehicles, encouraging people to ride buses, bike and walk (and making it easy!) addresses climate change and makes expensive car ownership less desirable.



Providing municipal amenities like parks, arts, playing fields, libraries, community centers, and shared meeting spaces is another solution for lowering individually-borne costs. As Issaquah contemplates replacing an old city hall and fire station, I have been advocating for inclusion of ample community spaces and recreational facilities.

**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?**

Issaquah has seen a dramatic increase in speeding violations in our jurisdiction. I have supported filling all of our traffic patrol positions, stronger enforcement of speed limits, speed cameras where appropriate, and additional safety signage located strategically in high-traffic areas as identified by staff engineers. Issaquah is upgrading its Intelligence Traffic Signals system, and I have voted to continue funding this project despite budget shortfalls. [A shoutout to the police social media expert, who puts out weekly and daily safety reminders].

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

Again, I have supported filling all of our police positions, including offering hiring bonuses, retention bonuses and increased salaries. Issaquah has a small department, so a few unfilled positions can have a significant impact on public safety measures. In addition, I campaigned in 2019 on adding behavioral health specialists to the police department. Those additional positions were added in 2020 and again in 2022 and have been incredibly successful in addressing public safety needs for those with mental health and substance abuse disorders. In addition, the behavioral health specialists have dealt successfully with homeless individuals and the many



senior citizens in our community who have no one to help or guide them as their mental and physical health deteriorates. At this point, I think the number of behavioral health specialists is "right-sized" for our community, but would advocate for additional personnel if the demand for services increases.

**The Eastside faces unique challenges when it comes to affordability, transit connectivity, and suburban versus city identity. What are your thoughts on how we can envision the future of urbanism on the Eastside?**

On the Eastside, we have 22 local communities, each with their own identity and culture. That said, these communities also share commonalities and especially share a need for services. I have been working regionally because I believe that the Eastside has a stronger voice in Olympia and Washington DC when we band together. I served as chair of the Eastside Transportation Partnership and helped write their legislative priorities letter for the past three years. I also served as chair of the Eastside Human Services Forum, and currently serve as vice-chair of the King County Regional Transit Committee. Just this morning, I met with a group of Eastside leaders, and we discussed the need to gather information and take stands to protect our interests in the face of the Trump administration. In addition, we all share a need for better transit options, more accessible health care, unified human services provisions, shared housing strategies and so forth. If we have Eastside leaders with vision in place, and a strong sense of shared values and needs, the Eastside can become more than a "bedroom community" or a collection of suburbs, to really flex its muscles as a significant and unique political entity while retaining the individual characters of its many cities.

**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 camping bans or sweeps because I do not believe in the criminalization of homelessness. To be clear, Issaquah has a so-called anti-camping ordinance that has been in place since the 1970's. However, the approach that I have favored and others on the council have approved is providing help to individuals who are experiencing homelessness whenever and wherever possible. Help is delivered through our behavioral health specialists or our human services department. We also used HR1590 funds to set up transitional housing at the local Motel 6 (this successful project was derailed, unfortunately, by the sale of Motel 6 to an international corporation located in Europe). Staff is currently working on a replacement transitional housing project, and we continue to provide vouchers for overnight stays at local and regional motels. The city has also relocated homeless individuals to nearby or regional shelters, and local services are provided through Issaquah Community Services, the Issaquah Food & Clothing Bank, Friends of Youth, and the Garage, A Teen Cafe. Once services have been offered and hopefully delivered, encampments located on city property may be closed to remove unhealthy living conditions, and individuals who refuse services may be asked to move on. Just for context, Issaquah owns 1600 acres of park property.

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

I have been a strong advocate for increased city support for human services. We are one of the cities that does include a Human Services element in our Comprehensive Plan, and there are some worthy HS policies there. The difficulty, for me, is that there is little connection between the Comprehensive Plan policies and the amount of funding budgeted for implementation of the plan.

That said, there has been a vast improvement in human services delivery since the beginning of my tenure. Thanks in great part to the pandemic, our human services



department has grown from 1 staff member to seven, and is much more visible in addressing needs in our community. The pandemic demonstrated 1) there is much more food insecurity, housing insecurity and basic needs insecurity in Issaquah than people realized; 2) Issaquah's human services network is patchy at best, with major gaps that could be filled by non-profits, city-resources, or public-private partnerships; 3) the non-profit organizations active in Issaquah "saved our bacon" during the food and housing crisis that followed the state and national shut-down.

I will continue advocating for budgets that reflect the importance of human services and the fulfillment of our Comprehensive Plan, especially in light of the economic disaster that is looming thanks to the Trump administration's chaotic and cruel decision-making.