



## **Caitlin Sullivan Urbanist Questionnaire 2025**

Kenmore City Council, Position 2

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

My first and primary goal is to shift the way we talk about housing, both on council and across the community. When we understand housing both as a basic need and the foundation for all other priorities, it becomes clear that good housing policy will support our ability to reduce emissions and meet our climate goals, as well as improving walkability and transit options throughout our community. Housing isn't just one priority – smart, future-minded housing policy that improves options and affordability for all members of our community is the foundation on which the success our other priorities is built

### **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 to remove barriers to housing production for smaller and more flexible housing types (multi-family, single-room occupancies, small homes on small lots, land-trusts, STEP, etc.) and actively incentivize them. While community engagement is vitally important, often public engagement in housing discussions has been dominated by housing opponents who want to “preserve the neighborhoods”. Outreach must be combined with education so the community understands the benefits they will experience by making these policy changes. The decisions



ultimately need to be based on research and improving outcomes for all residents, even if we experience vocal opponents at public hearings.

**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 would prefer progressive funding sources, both as part of a rebalancing of existing regressive sources and certainly as an alternative to cutting programs, and I'm open to considering any that are viable. Washington is one of the most regressive states in the country for our tax structure and ranks near the top of the list for highest home prices and highest cost of living. Our current system doesn't work for the majority of our residents, and part of that is the outsized tax burden on lower incomes individuals and families.

**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?**

Housing and transportation are the top two expenditures for most households, and the dominance of low-density, single-family zoning in Kenmore both drives up housing cost and reduces transit options (we don't have the "mass" for "mass transit"). Incorporating missing-middle housing and ADUs into the code is a step, but we need to go beyond the bare-bones requirement and remove portions of our code that drive up housing costs and discourage development of more affordable homes (ie, short-plat requirements when unit-lot subdivisions are allowed).



**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?**

I'd love to see more sidewalks, but we're in a bit of a catch22 here since our density is so low (current zoning is between one and six units per acre for most of the city) and the layout of our streets was designed to be car-dependent with long blocks and few through-streets. Other cities have approached the unnaturally long "blocks" by creating a pedestrian walkway via easement through the center, which would be tremendously helpful for our pedestrians, both in safety and community walkability. Increasing sidewalks and safe crossings should be incorporated as density increases.

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

In terms of the normal activity of daily life, Kenmore is performing well from a public safety perspective. There is always the lingering concern of what happens when there's an event that overwhelms the system – like an earthquake – and our first responders are unable to handle the magnitude of the event. For this we really do need community involvement, and neighborhood associations would be a great way to foster this. The neighborhood associations could assist with disaster preparedness for emergencies, but on a daily basis provides a support network for our residents that doesn't rely on public dollars.



## **What have you done/will you do to increase collaboration at city hall and ensure all residents are included?**

Building a foundation for productive and involved collaboration with all residents starts with education and outreach (beyond noticing a meeting or sending a flyer with the utility bill). With geofencing technology, it's possible to send text messages to all of our residents with cell phones, which would reach a larger percentage of our population, and could be used to link to informational materials/videos about city issues. With highly charged issues, such as STEP housing, allowing a safe space for those who support the issue to respond and comment without fear of causing friction with neighbors.

## **What actions should the city take to address the climate crisis?**

We need to start seeing ourselves as part of a larger ecosystem. Environmental preservation vs. density is a false dichotomy. If we had the density of New York City, we could house all the residents of Washington State in the Seattle area, just .5% of the total land area of the state – leaving the rest untouched. Density is environmental preservation. Promoting cities that are walkable, transit-oriented and have smaller, denser housing options decrease carbon emissions and commuting time, makes more efficient use of infrastructure, decrease home energy (largest carbon emission source in the city) and personal consumption.

## **What is your financial sustainability plan for the city?**

The collective refrain from cities in our area is that we're either broke or will be soon. Kenmore apparently has a few more years, but the deficit is big enough that cuts alone won't solve it. We will need to explore new revenue sources (that do not provide additional burden to members of our community that cannot afford it) but



also advocate for changes at the state level so the increase of our portion of property taxes keeps up with inflation, at a minimum.

**What are your top transportation goals for the city, and how will you get them done? What is your plan to improve walkability, bike safety, and accessibility in your community?**

We have to start with envisioning what Kenmore will look like 20 years from now and then work backwards. What we currently have is a fragmented, primarily car-dependent, city with little walkability and no regular public transit to half the city. The future of Kenmore could be density centered along our major roads (that spur off of 522) with neighborhood commercial (restaurants, shops, coffee, etc) that is walkable – with sidewalks, bike lanes, and bus service. This all starts with housing policy that is forward-looking and designed to promote the improvements we need.

**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 grew up in Seattle and we lived across from Cowen Park and there was constantly someone living in a van or car out in front of our house. It wasn't by choice – it was because they had no other option. People need to live somewhere, and in the absence of providing actual solutions (STEP housing, housing that is affordable at all income levels, expanding cohousing options, etc), camping bans and sweeps just move the problem elsewhere. If we're unwilling to take meaningful steps to address homelessness (ie, fixing our housing crisis) then we have no business criminalizing it.



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

There is a lot to like in the comp plan as written, I think the issues come when it gets down to implementation. For example, our comp plan identified low-density zoning as a barrier to housing production and recommended increasing the allowed density to eight units of middle housing per lot in R6. Planning commission recommended two, which council affirmed, resulting in a net difference in middle housing density potential of 36 units per acre. If we're able to lean on the comp plan as a guide for policy, we have the capacity to actually enact meaningful change.