



## **Kelly Jiang Urbanist Questionnaire 2025**

City of Issaquah, Position 1

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

(1) Reduce permitting times - our small businesses constantly complain that permitting for tenant improvements takes months longer in Issaquah than in any other jurisdiction. Our average review time for a short plat permit is FIFTEEN WEEKS! This is excessive, hinders housing production, and wastes city resources. (2) Build more mixed use in Central Issaquah - I am embarrassed to admit that Issaquah updated our Title 18 land use code in 2023, and we are just now seeing the first project attempt to be built with that code and reveal some issues that need to be addressed. In 2011, we adopted the Central Issaquah Plan, which promised 7,000 new housing units in Central Issaquah by 2035. So far, we've built ~1,000. (3)

### **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?**

To boost housing options, I will look into creative options to encourage development of middle housing at affordable price points. This could include creating pre-approved floor plans for stacked flats or offering affordable housing incentives for middle housing development from Issaquah's Inclusive Housing Investment Pool (IHIP). I would also look for ways to enable construction of apartments in Central Issaquah. I think the biggest issue there is frankly our arcane land use code, which needs to be re-evaluated.



To engage the public on shelters, transitional housing, emergency housing, and permanent supportive housing, I would engage in community meetings and discussions about any proposed project well ahead of time to ensure the community has the chance to have their questions answered and addressed. I also think it's important to encourage engagement from neighbors who believe in the importance of these types of supportive housing options. I think those folks could also play a role in educating other community members about the importance of supportive housing.

**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?**

For a small city like Issaquah, we really don't have many options for progressive revenue sources. Sales tax is the most regressive revenue source, while property taxes are likely less regressive (and some may argue they're somewhat progressive, as wealthier people tend to own properties with higher assessed values). I would support looking into options for levies to support things like parks or public safety, which would free up general fund dollars for other priorities. I think a vacancy tax on rental housing could be a great way to incentivize property owners to lower rents, while also bringing in progressive revenue. I would also be open to some increase in B&O taxes or payroll taxes, although I do believe we need to be careful about how those might unduly harm small businesses.

I think there are also opportunities to look into how we can do things more effectively. The most obvious examples that come to mind involve high consulting costs. For example, we're spending \$1 million this biennium to hire a consultant to do a light rail study to determine our preferred alternative - could there be a way to do that for less? We also hired a consultant to review our permit process and



recommend ways to improve the process. Perhaps there could have been other more cost-effective ways to identify improvements.

**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?**

The most important strategy to make the region more affordable to live in is to increase the supply and diversity of housing types. Housing is the biggest line item in most households' budgets. The primary reason housing costs are skyrocketing is simply that the amount of new housing units built has not kept up with number of people moving here (to the Puget Sound region in general). To support increasing the supply and diversity of housing types, I would look to streamline permitting for all types of housing. In this high interest rate environment, every month of delay in permitting can cost a builder thousands of dollars in interest.

I would also look to simplify the land use code to make it workable for developers. We have some very bizarre requirements in our land use code that I believe should be revisited. Finally, while I wholeheartedly believe that we need to build efficient, electrified housing to meet our climate goals, we need to assess the cost vs benefit of the existing environmental codes we have. Some regulations may have a high cost but a comparatively low environmental benefit, and we should consider removing those requirements.

**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?**



To make our streets safer for all users, we need to install traffic calming measures - which could be things like roundabouts, speed humps, adding chokers at crosswalks, and more. There are too many roads that lend themselves to traveling faster than the speed limit (particularly egregious examples include Newport Way - which was clearly designed for cars going 50-55 mph despite the current speed limit of 30 - and East Lake Sammamish Parkway.) I believe we also need to do more to build out a network of fully separated bike paths to increase safety. I bike around town a decent amount, and there are definitely times I fear for my life when riding in a tiny shoulder "bike lane" next to cars.

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

Issaquah is already generally a pretty safe place, but one area of public safety where we could really improve is emergency preparedness. This was made glaringly obvious by the recent bomb cyclone, but we also are vulnerable to wildfires, extreme heat, and earthquakes. I would support increased trainings on emergency preparedness through our CERT volunteer program. I would also look to explore ways to engage the community in emergency preparedness. Social and community infrastructure is so important to emergency preparedness, especially for the most vulnerable members of our community. I would support community groups in reaching out to their neighbors to build those neighborhood ties so that they can be leveraged when things go south in a mega earthquake or wildfire. There are certainly other things we can do to increase our resilience to natural disasters, such as installing solar + storage systems on community buildings to offer warming or cooling centers to residents.



**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?**

I think the Eastside actually has tremendous opportunity for urbanism. With light rail coming to the Eastside, we have the opportunity to develop a connected network of transit-oriented, walkable, complete communities. We also need to develop last-mile connections, such as bike paths, pedestrian infrastructure, and local circulator shuttles, to ensure that folks that live in our existing neighborhoods also have access to the new amenities that will be coming with the arrival of light rail. I also believe there is actually more demand for walkable communities on the Eastside as younger people like myself determine where to put down roots. Homes in walkable neighborhoods in Issaquah sell for just as much, or more than, comparable homes in Ballard. There's clearly demand, and it's up to us to build out the neighborhoods and communities where people actually want to live.

**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 believe that camping bans or sweeps are an appropriate strategy for Issaquah. Most of the unhoused individuals in Issaquah camp in the woods - even if that's technically public property, they're typically not super disruptive to Issaquah residents. We have a homeless outreach team that goes out and meets with our unhoused residents and works to connect them with services. It typically takes several visits for the unhoused residents to gain enough trust to actually accept those services.

I think our current policies to protect and support our neighbors are good, but the implementation still leaves more to be desired. For example, we used to have a



transitional housing option at Motel 6, but due to a change in ownership at Motel 6, they were unable to continue the program. As a result, most of the individuals that were in that transitional housing re-entered homelessness. I believe we need to continue doing everything possible to identify a facility that can provide this transitional housing.

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

(1) I think the overall housing goal in our comprehensive plan is quite low. We have a target of 3,500 additional units by 2044. Compare that to the Central Issaquah Plan, which was adopted in 2011 and targeted 7,000 additional units by 2035.

(2) I think our comprehensive plan needs to be clear that existing neighborhoods will need to see some amount of redevelopment. When we were discussing middle housing, city staff claimed that upzoning to 4 units per lot was "not consistent with the goals set in our comprehensive plan." I think this means we should revisit the comprehensive plan.

(3) Our comprehensive plan has no mention of "complete communities." Traffic is a huge concern for Issaquah residents, and one of the best ways to reduce traffic is to make it so that people can walk, bike, or roll to do their daily errands. This requires creating complete communities, and I believe we should include that in our comprehensive plan.