



Lindsey Walsh Urbanist Questionnaire 2025

Mayor of Issaquah

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

cost-of-living, traffic congestion, public safety

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?

Issaquah is a city with a population of 42K, but everyday 28K people commute into the city for work – many because they can't afford to live here. This includes our firefighters, retail workers, teachers, police, and others who contribute to our community. Enabling families to live closer to work not only means less traffic, but it's also good for our small businesses who have a difficult time recruiting and retaining employees who face a long commute.

Boosting housing options for folks at all income levels requires a mix of strategies. First, we need to enable the building of more housing to keep up with demand. Second, we need more housing options with smaller units for more natural affordability. Third, for deeper needs we must be prepared to gift land or otherwise subsidize development.



The residents of Issaquah have welcomed the emergency housing pilot project that we started in 2021, providing the first emergency shelter in the city's history. We also have a variety of affordable housing, including some for people recently facing homelessness, which the community has been in support of. If we had options for additional shelter or permanent supportive housing, I would happily point to those successful projects, while listening to our residents' concerns.

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?

City revenue options are limited by the state, leaving us with a structural deficit and few truly progressive revenue sources. Three of Issaquah's four major sources of revenue - sales taxes, property taxes, and utility taxes - are regressive. Our most progressive revenue source is business taxes, where we have more control over how it impacts. As Mayor I would advocate to the state legislature for more progressive revenue options.

Issaquah has regularly cut expenses in order to stay within our budget while still maintaining services important to our community - fire, safety, parks, road maintenance, and more. I support our efforts to make responsible budgetary decisions rather than overextend ourselves, which is particularly important during the uncertainty brought on by the Trump era.

Looking over the long term, we have to realize that Eastside cities were built in a suburban model which isn't sustainable with our current revenue and tax options.



Unless we want cities that are only able to provide the bare necessities – police, fire, and roads – and not other amenities – parks, economic development, Senior Centers, snow plowing, Farmer's Markets, and much more – then we will need to address this looming issue of structural deficits.

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?

We need to legalize housing options that allow for smaller units, making each one more affordable. This also spreads the cost of land across more homes, reducing the cost of building. Combine that with streamlined permitting, which reduces holding costs while waiting for your permit to be approved, and we could see housing produced at lower costs.

In Issaquah we had a great example of keeping costs down from an upcoming affordable housing project with King County Housing Authority (KCHA). The state allows affordable housing developers to push back on land use code that makes projects too expensive, so KCHA came to us with specific examples they wanted waived which would save millions of dollars and preserve more affordable units. We carefully considered this based on our community values and found the changes completely reasonable. These are the ways we should utilize the expertise of affordable housing developers to reduce costs and make housing more attainable. I would also consider applying those same recommendations to market rate housing, thus also reducing costs for more homes.



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?

Pedestrian traffic deaths often happen due to vehicle speeds, unsafe driving behaviors, and roads that were designed to allow speeds not compatible with multi-modal uses. We have plenty of evidence that road changes, even starting with low-cost tests of painted curb bulb outs, can save lives. Whenever we repave a road, we should always include modifications to street markings geared toward improving safety. New roadways or complete redesigns should prioritize raised separations and complete streets.

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

As a member of the Issaquah Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), I am invested in local public safety. We all deserve to be and feel safe in our community. Issaquah is a safe city, with low violent crime rates. Our largest share of crimes are property crimes, like shoplifting and package thefts. We've done excellent work with our businesses to reduce organized retail theft and encourage reporting of these crimes. Since 2022 larceny theft is down substantially by 55%. This is a great example of police working with the community to improve public safety, and I want to ensure this approach continues. For those low-level offenses driven by socioeconomic factors, our Community Court does an excellent job of diversion from the criminal justice system. This helps address the root causes – housing, education, chemical dependency, mental health care, and more – to reduce recidivism. I would continue this emphasis where possible.



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 goals of urbanism – creating sustainable, livable, and vibrant communities that foster a sense of community and improve the quality of life for residents – is shared by everyone. We know based on vacation patterns that people enjoy walkable, human-scaled places – such as Disneyland or European cities. What differs is merely how we approach the problem and which parts of urbanism you prioritize. If you focus more on reducing car usage without significant increases in transit service, you'll lose folks. However, if you start with other elements, such as mixed-use development and walkability, that can make the transition from suburbia to a more livable city easier.

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

Issaquah has \$27 million in federal grants that are at risk. These are either projects where we've already done work but haven't been reimbursed, or projects that we've postponed starting because of the risks to our finances. We also know there will be less available federal funding in the next 4 years for things like environmental protection, equity training, and climate action. These will all force tough choices, and we may see less progress locally as a result. I'm committed to running a fiscally sustainable city willing to face those difficult decisions rather than overreaching.



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?

Issaquah doesn't have this problem. We have an effective code enforcement team who respond to complaints and uphold our laws for the benefit of our residents and natural environment. Further, we work to protect our open spaces with land acquisition around our creeks, steep slopes, and forested hillsides. After acquisition we focus on land restoration and rehabilitation to preserve the ecosystem and habitat.

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

I'm proud of the Comprehensive Plan that Issaquah adopted, which included our first Climate Element among other achievements. We also easily achieved the zoning capacity for our housing targets due to a previous upzone of the Central Issaquah Plan area which will support our future light rail station.

Where we can go further is with our implementation into code and policies. Often, we find the right ways to talk about a topic in the Comprehensive Plan but fail to see it through to action. One example of this is in the Transportation Element where our Comp Plan has advocated for a multimodal system and complete streets, but the



reality on the ground is still very car-centric with many streets that don't support safe walking and biking.

What is your approach to finding common ground between slow growth advocates opposing change in their neighborhoods and pro-housing advocates pressing to meet broader community needs?

I do a lot of listening. I recognize that changes to the place you call home can feel threatening and uncertain, so the first point is to empathize with that fear. This happened recently in Issaquah as we considered middle housing implementation. A group of neighbors invited me out to chat to express their concerns. I was able to note the things we are doing to make the state requirement work for Issaquah, such as protections for critical areas. I also pointed out that some of our neighborhoods have had duplex zoning for over a decade, but the housing still remains predominantly single family. Many of the changes we'll see in established neighborhoods will happen gradually, not all at once, but no neighborhood should be exempt from changing over time.

Planned upcoming expansions to Sound Transit services will reshape the transportation and connectivity of the region. How would you, as mayor, support this regional effort to expand multi-modal transit? How will you foster a positive relationship between Sound Transit, local businesses, and residents?

Sound Transit light rail isn't coming to Issaquah until at least 2041, so we have a way to go. We're starting our station planning now to ensure it is walkable, reflects our community values, and the land around the chosen station location is well served



with housing and business options. This will be a very public process with lots of community engagement opportunities. We've learned many lessons from station sitting in other communities and want to ensure our community is heard in the planning process. We're already seeing the success of light rail in the area with the Bellevue and Redmond stations and are eager to see the connection across the bridge to Seattle. Until Issaquah's turn, I look forward to advocating for additional bus service to connect our residents to the light rail network.