



Neal Black Urbanist Questionnaire 2025

Kirkland City Council, Position 5

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

(1) Implementation of Kirkland's 2044 update to its Comprehensive Plan's housing elements; (2) Implementation of Kirkland's 2044 update to its Comprehensive Plan's mobility and transit elements; (3) Continued investments in improvements to community-based behavioral health and human services

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?

During my 5 years on the Council, we've made a lot of progress in developing policies to encourage a greater number of housing units, at all price points, and a greater mix of housing typologies. We've also adopted innovations related to form-based code for mixed commercial and residential, incentive zoning for affordability and other community benefits, and some of the deepest inclusionary zoning on the Eastside. That's reflected in Kirkland's Missing Middle Housing ordinance I helped develop and adopt in 2020, Kirkland's 85th/I-405 Bus Rapid Transit Station Area Plan I helped develop and adopt in 2023, and Kirkland's 2044 update to its Comprehensive Plan I helped develop and adopt in 2024. During my time on the Council, Kirkland also has welcomed emergency shelters (including tent



cities), fully funded Kirkland's hotel voucher program, supported Kirkland's safe parking program, laid the groundwork for the opening of permanent supportive housing at Kirkland's former La Quinta Inn, increased investments in subsidized affordable housing through ARCH, and hired our first Homeless Outreach Coordinator. I help Kirkland balance community objections to housing by investing in the concurrent infrastructure necessary to support housing, including traditional infrastructure, such as water, sewer, and streets, but also infrastructure related to public safety, behavioral health, public transit, parks, open space, trails, pedestrian facilities, bicycle facilities, and schools.

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?

Among taxes collected for WA cities (and permitted under WA law), the most progressive is property taxes. Granting municipalities authority to increase property taxes by more than 1% per year has been on Kirkland's state legislative agenda for years, and I support that policy. I think a balance can be struck by granting each municipality authority to increase their portion of property taxes by an amount equal to the lesser of (1) an amount determined by an agreed-upon measure of inflation over the prior year, plus the increase in population over that same period, and (2) a cap of approximately 5%. (A 3% lift has been proposed in past legislative sessions. A 7% lift was introduced this legislative session. Five percent is in the middle of that range.) A reasonable property tax lift allows cities to maintain their levels of service, despite increases in population and inflation, while reserving property tax ballot measures for meaningful increases above that baseline, thereby giving voters the level of services they expect and relief from repeatedly voting on tax levies. Repeatedly voting on tax levies, under a property tax system that few property



owners understand, erodes voters' confidence in government. And, in advocating for reasonable property tax reform, I appreciate having in place state-mandated property tax relief for low-income seniors and those with disabilities, as well as Kirkland's own universal low-income discount program, which I helped develop and adopt.

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 mentioned above, during my time on the Council, we've made a lot of strides in developing policies to improve housing affordability, in the near-term and over the long-term, and increase the overall diversity of housing typologies. In 2020, I helped develop one of WA's first Missing Middle Housing ordinances, and we're starting to see the fruits of that effort, with more duplexes, triplexes, cottages, ADUs, and DADUs getting built. ADUs, in particular, have the ability to create housing affordable for Kirkland's working-class families. Few were being built prior to adoption of Middle Housing. Even larger housing typologies - though not necessarily affordable today - positively influence the preservation of naturally occurring affordable housing through the positive effects of vacancy chains as long as they represent an increase in units. In addition, the smaller typologies we encourage will become part of a system of more naturally occurring affordable housing as units age. I've encouraged us to view housing as a complete system that includes policy considerations like those described above, together with efforts to balance inclusionary zoning with incentive zoning; phase in implementation of affordability requirements, when necessary; and introduce exclusions for, or phase in, impact fees for affordable housing types. I've also helped develop an initiative that is examining



any requirements in Kirkland that make affordable housing unnecessarily expensive to get built.

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'm focused on creating bicycle facilities where riders of all ages and abilities feel safe to ride (which includes other means of rolling). That work involves developing our trail network and connections; developing more bicycle greenways (many of miles of which have been added in Kirkland during my time on the Council); and, where feasible, creating physical separation between bicycle lanes adjacent to existing lanes of vehicle traffic. Even in areas of Kirkland where it's no longer feasible to separate bicycle lanes from existing lanes of vehicle traffic, there are opportunities, at intersections, where the risks of vehicle-bicycle collisions are highest, to create more separation. For pedestrian safety, Kirkland continues to focus on investing in new traffic and pedestrian signaling facilities at intersections (and long stretches of roadway and trail crossings) that halt vehicle traffic and help keep pedestrians visible and safe, including rapid flashing beacons and H.A.W.K. devices. And any discussion of bicycle and pedestrian safety would be incomplete without a discussion of getting people out of their cars and into walkable neighborhood centers where fewer people drive and more people can live where they work, shop, eat, and play.

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



During my time on the Kirkland Council, my emphasis (along with others) has been on better law enforcement and better responses to crises in the community. I view our strategy as being two-pronged. The first prong is to recruit and retain the best officers and – this is important – hold them to the highest standards for professional, responsible, fair, and effective law enforcement. This involves, on the one hand, signaling my commitment to our officers being successful while doing an extremely difficult job and, on the other hand, ensuring that the Department holds our officers to the highest professional standards. The second prong of the strategy is to replace officers as crisis responders, homelessness outreach coordinators, behavioral health specialists, and school counselors – meaning, replace them with actual trained professionals in counseling, social work, and behavioral health. In Kirkland, we've done that with the launch of our Regional Community Response Agency (or RCR); the changes Kirkland made to our School Resource Officer program with Lake Washington School District; the hiring of Kirkland's first Homelessness Outreach Coordinator; and the opening of the region's first 24/7, no-wrong-door Crisis Care Clinic. This two-pronged strategy has been received extremely well by our officers and our community.

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?

The key is to focus on continuing to concentrate future growth in our existing built environment (more housing units, a greater mix of housing types, and denser and more walkable neighborhood centers) in order to achieve the parallel goals of (1) protecting more farms, fields, and forests; (2) reducing sprawl; (3) reducing car trips; (4) reducing traffic congestion; (5) reducing greenhouse gas emissions; (6) making public transit more effective and efficient; (7) leveraging existing infrastructure more



efficiently; (8) fostering more complete communities; (9) creating a more reliable workforce for small businesses; and (10) building stronger communities. But, in doing that, we will need to also pay attention to the investments needed in the concurrent infrastructure to support that future growth. As mentioned above, that includes traditional infrastructure, such as water, sewer, and streets, but it also includes infrastructure related to public safety, behavioral health, public transit, parks, open space, trails, pedestrian facilities, bicycle facilities, and schools.

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've insisted, along with others in Kirkland, that we treat homelessness, as well as any related issues associated with substance use disorder or behavioral health, as a system of policies and programs linked along a continuum of care. This continuum of care continues to be my priority, and every element of the continuum requires the City's attention. Any weakness along the continuum can lead to a failure to support vulnerable neighbors. The continuum starts with homelessness outreach and community-based behavioral health. That includes policies and programs I've helped develop during my time on the Council - namely, the hiring of Kirkland's first Homelessness Outreach Coordinator; the formation of the state's first multi-jurisdictional community responder agency, the creation of Kirkland's inter-departmental Homelessness Action Response Team, and the opening of the region's first 24/7, no-wrong-door Crisis Care Clinic. It also includes hotel vouchers, temporary shelter, permanent supportive housing, and low-income and subsidized housing. At each step, the goal is a person-centric approach that helps vulnerable neighbors navigate to the resources they need without the need for camping bans or sweeps. Policies and programs linked together along a continuum of care is the only way I know to successfully move people from chronic homelessness (often



stemming from, or contributing to, substance use disorder and behavioral health problems) to safe, stable housing and jobs.

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

Kirkland's 2044 update to its Comprehensive Plan is a vision statement for the next 20 years of growth - jobs and housing - including affordable housing. As a vision statement, it goes quite far. But the real change comes from implementation - from a combination of city leaders making, first, the land-use and zoning decisions that implement the plan's vision (where growth will be a combination of a greater mix of middle housing typologies throughout the city; more concentrated housing, retail, commercial and other mixed urban development in and near Kirkland's neighborhood centers; and more transit-oriented development in and near Kirkland's high-frequency transit centers) and, second, decisions related to concurrent infrastructure projects, programs, and initiatives that help growth and urbanism work for more people who want to live in walkable neighborhoods with access to important services and amenities, access to speedy and reliable transit, and the ability to live where they work and work where they live. This requires attention to traditional infrastructure improvements related to pedestrian and bicycle safety, transit, and other mobility. It also requires attention to other concurrent infrastructure, like parks, open space, recreation facilities, and schools. And it requires advocacy with Kirkland's transit partners, Metro and Sound Transit. I'm one of Kirkland's key advocates for transit investments as an appointed member of the King County Transit Committee.