



Sam Méndez Urbanist Questionnaire 2025

Burien City Council, Position 3

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

Housing affordability (e.g. housing density), safer streets for bicyclists and pedestrians, government accountability & transparency

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?

I will explore all options to allow Burien to be a livable place for people of all income levels. This would include taking a close look at the Comprehensive Plan to see if improvements can be made, particularly around upzoning areas on transit corridors. I would support publicly funding housing if the city had available funding. I would support a sanctioned encampment on city-owned property for our unhoused residents, in which services, sanitation, and security would be provided. These housing priorities dovetail with my safer streets priority, in which I want residents to be better able to transport themselves without cars. Listening to people is an important value of mine, so I would support making it easy for people to make public comment and interact with city government. That said, I recognize that often the people most able to comment are more financially well off, and would make efforts to reach people of all income levels to listen to their perspective.



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?

Yes, absolutely. I support a wealth tax and/or a progressive income tax at the state level. I'd be interested to see if a payroll tax like Seattle's JumpStart would work in Burien. We are also facing a real budget shortfall, and the city is constrained in how it can raise revenue, especially in a way that doesn't disproportionately affect the working class. If we were required to make budget cuts, preserving public services would be my top priority.

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?

More housing, and denser housing. We need to build up. Rising rents and housing costs contribute to rising prices in other areas, like the cost of food at restaurants. If we keep our current housing stock as it is, the problem will only get worse as our working class families are priced out and move elsewhere, affecting the diversity and vibrancy of Burien. Increasing our housing capacity in Burien, as well as the entire region, would slow the increase of rent. This requires government intervention as well, to ensure that the housing capacity provides for affordable and transitional housing. I support renter protections as well, but I believe increasing our housing supply is the most important strategy.



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?

This is a top priority of mine. I would explore how we can make walk signs more pedestrian friendly (i.e. not requiring a button to be pushed in order to walk). I would explore building bike lanes. I would partner with King County Metro to see what programs are available that Burien has not yet implemented (e.g. shuttle programs). Burien has a severe shortage of sidewalks--we as a family experience this every day when we walk our small child to daycare. If we had the funding, I would install sidewalks on nearly every block in the city, but I'm realistic in the high cost that comes with that. Finally, I'd explore other traffic calming measures, like lower speed limits on surface streets.

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

Public safety means different things to different communities. For some it may mean more police, while for others, police are a source of violence to that community. I don't believe armed police should necessarily be the first, or only, point of contact for a crisis. I would encourage use of the 988 mental health emergency line, and explore other options for making services available to people in need separate from law enforcement. I would also explore how Burien law enforcement (contracted with the King County Sheriff Department) are trained, and whether improvements can be made in how they interact in Burien's diverse communities, and whether they have been trained in the science of trauma.



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

I know that the City of Burien missed a deadline in 2023 from King County for \$1 million in funding for social services for the unhoused, which is inexcusable. That funding is no longer available. I'm not sure how funding cuts from the federal government in 2025 have affected Burien yet—I know the state faced a large budget deficit which has meant fewer resources would be available statewide. I also know that federal cuts to Medicaid are currently being planned in Congress. This would have a direct serious impact on Burien residents, many of whom are eligible for Medicaid. This is an issue to be addressed at the federal and state levels, but I would prioritize good communication with Burien residents, even when it is a problem that the city cannot solve. It is crucial that residents be informed and aware of what is happening in government at all levels.

What are your views on the SeaTac Sustainable Airport Master Plan and how will it impact your jurisdiction? What plans do you have to address the impacts of the airport on your community?

In general, I don't support the massive increase in infrastructure at SeaTac Int'l, in which it is expected a ~20% increase in passengers in the next five years alone. A large population of Burien residents live directly under the SeaTac flight path, with studied negative impacts on noise and health. I believe the Puget Sound region needs a second airport, though I would much prefer to see significantly expanded train infrastructure, including high speed rail. For the city's work, I have two priorities on this. First, communicate with the public clearly so they know what to expect, listen to their concerns, and address what the city can. Second, explore with the Port



and the Legislature on what resources can be brought to Burien's most impacted neighborhoods--which are disproportionately working-class--to mitigate the negative impacts of increased growth in flights at SeaTac Int'l.

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?

Illegal dumping is certainly within the City's purview, and should prioritize these efforts. Burien recently passed a tree canopy law in order to protect trees of a certain size from removal without advance approval. Though the city does not have significant rural land, it is critical that we protect our park land and tree canopy. This can be our contribution to fighting climate change, and also increases overall health. Increasing housing density also can alleviate the pressure of building on empty land that could otherwise be used as green space.

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, and overturning Burien's current camping ban is a priority of mine. Sweeps are neither effective or humane. Our current camping ban has also resulted in multiple lawsuits, costing valuable city resources that could be used elsewhere. Instead of litigating with King County, I would partner with King County and other neighboring cities to take a regional approach to the



unhoused. I would support more transitional and affordable housing being built in Burien. I would also support sanctioned encampments where the unhoused can live, and I would prioritize social services to assist these people in getting off the streets.

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

I need to research the current comprehensive plan further to know how it can be improved--currently I don't know. I know the legislature has passed numerous housing bills that affect local jurisdictions. Given that the current council is more conservative, I do not believe housing density, affordable housing, or transitional housing are priorities for them. They are for me. I also support rezoning residential neighborhoods currently zoned as single-family-only. I would do this while listening to city residents, and it is crucial in a conversation like this to communicate what the city would and would not do, because it is often a misunderstood issue. But single-family-only sprawl contributes to the affordability crisis and to single-occupancy vehicles on roads, both of which I wish to mitigate.