



Steffanie Fain Urbanist Questionnaire 2025

King County Council, District 5

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

Public Safety Everyone deserves to feel safe in their neighborhood, on transit, and at work. I'll advocate for investments in co-responder and alternative response programs that connect people in crisis with care—relieving pressure on first responders and emergency rooms. We must also invest upstream in violence prevention, youth programs, and mental health services, while ensuring fairness and accountability in our justice system. **Homelessness** Homelessness is a visible symptom of deeper failures in our housing and behavioral health systems. I'll work to expand access to housing options across the board and improve service coordination so people don't fall through the cracks. We must also hold publicly funded providers accountable for delivering results and drive regionally aligned, outcome-based strategies. **Housing & Affordability** The cost of living is outpacing wages. I'll support targeted zoning changes, streamlined permitting, and transit-oriented development to increase housing supply. I'll also expand access to apprenticeships, job training, and workforce development to create economic mobility for working families and small businesses. There are no easy solutions, but we must prioritize behavioral health while removing barriers. I've spent my career uniting business, labor, and community to solve tough problems—and I'll bring that same collaborative approach to the King County Council.

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?

Addressing South King County's housing crisis requires a balanced, pragmatic approach that expands options while building public trust. We must increase production of housing at all levels—especially middle housing and ADUs—through incentives like density bonuses, reduced parking minimums, and streamlined permitting. Upzoning near frequent transit and using publicly owned land are also key tools when paired with infrastructure planning and community support.

In high-opportunity areas, incentives alone may fall short. I support well-designed affordability requirements—paired with public investment, technical support, or fee deferrals—to keep projects viable and aligned with community needs.

Public safety is a key concern for communities, especially when it comes to new shelters or supportive housing. I would ensure that projects are well-managed, staffed, and supported, prior to bringing them to residents. It's also essential to engage residents early and often. I'll work to build trust through neighborhood forums, inclusive planning, and by elevating the voices of service providers and people with lived experience.

Change isn't easy, but housing stability is essential for public safety, economic opportunity, and community well-being. I'll lead with collaboration and data-driven strategies—bringing people together to ensure every family has a safe, affordable place to call home in the community where they work.



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 believe government must serve people first—by investing in essential services like public safety, healthcare, housing, infrastructure, and behavioral health. But with rising costs and federal uncertainty, we need to be both responsible and responsive. That means starting with a clear-eyed review of current spending: evaluating outcomes, cutting duplication, and phasing out programs that no longer meet today's needs.

Before asking the public for more, we must prove we're good stewards of public dollars. King County's budget has grown significantly over the last few years, and we owe it to residents to prioritize what works and ensure every dollar counts.

I support a balanced approach that includes progressive revenue tools—such as closing tax loopholes, leveraging public-private partnerships, and considering new sources that are transparent, equitable, and tied to core services. Any new funding should avoid placing unnecessary burdens on working families or small businesses.

Budgets reflect our values. I'll focus on what delivers real results, ensures long-term sustainability, and keeps government accountable to the people it serves. Responsible budgeting and smart investments are the foundation for a stronger, more equitable King County.



Governor Bob Ferguson has been resistant to lifting the 1% property tax lift cap, which has depleted King County resources over the past 25 years. How would you lobby to get this lid lifted or find alternative funding sources to overcome this limitation?

Many South King County residents are wary of property tax increases—not because they don't value public services, but because they haven't consistently seen the benefits in their neighborhoods. That lack of visible return erodes trust, and we must rebuild it. I believe in the power of government to improve lives—but only if we're good stewards of public dollars. That means setting clear priorities, measuring impact, eliminating inefficiencies, sunseting outdated programs, and aligning spending with community needs before asking taxpayers for more. The 1% property tax cap, unchanged for 25 years, has limited King County's ability to meet rising costs and deliver essential services. If we want safe transit, robust behavioral healthcare, and safe infrastructure, we also need to have an honest conversation about adjusting the cap. If elected, I'll push for a more transparent, outcome-driven budget process and advocate for fair investment in South King County. I'll also pursue state and federal partnerships, close outdated tax loopholes, and leverage public-private partnerships. Trust is built when public dollars deliver real results. I'll fight for smart investments that communities can see and feel—because that's how we move forward.

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 improve affordability is increasing and preserving housing people can actually afford. Housing is the single biggest driver of cost in our region, and addressing it requires common-sense reforms, strong partnerships, and a coordinated regional approach.

That starts with modernizing our land use policies to encourage housing development—updating zoning, streamlining permitting, and incentivizing smart density to support housing like duplexes, ADUs, and cottage clusters near transit and job centers. We should explore ways to templatize and digitize infill permitting to reduce delays and make smaller-scale development more viable for local builders.

I also support public investment in community land trusts and nonprofit housing providers that deliver long-term affordability. But production alone isn't enough—we must also prevent displacement and ensure housing stability. That includes rental assistance, legal support in eviction proceedings, longer notice periods for rent increases, and stronger enforcement of health and safety standards.

Most importantly, I'll lead with a regional perspective. The housing crisis doesn't stop at city borders—so neither should our solutions. With aligned planning policies on housing, land use, and transportation, as well as clear goals and shared accountability, we can build a more affordable future for all King County residents.

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



We need a smarter, more effective public safety system—one that addresses immediate needs while tackling the root causes of harm. As a longtime Harborview Medical Center Board trustee, I know how essential behavioral health is to community safety. We must ensure cities have fully staffed first responders, while also investing in robust co- and alternative-responder programs. These programs improve outcomes and allow first responders to focus on incidents that require their specialized training and authority. We must strengthen coordination across the behavioral health system so individuals don't fall through the cracks during transitions—like from detox to inpatient treatment to housing and long-term support. Behavioral health should be part of the same continuum of care as physical health, with sustainable funding, shared data, and coordinated delivery. Integration is key to early intervention, long-term recovery, and safer communities. We also need to invest upstream in youth violence prevention, school-based programs, and crisis response infrastructure. To bring this vision to life, I'll work with first responders, community organizations, healthcare providers, and local governments to realign public safety investments with what works—listening to frontline experts, setting clear metrics, and rebuilding trust. Public safety isn't just about enforcement—it's about prevention, coordination, and care.

How do you plan to improve public safety for transit operators and riders, and boost ridership and transit accessibility?

Everyone deserves to feel safe on transit—riders, operators, and frontline workers alike. That's why I'm proud to be endorsed by Amalgamated Transit Union Local 587 for my commitment to transit safety, accessibility, and partnership with those who know the system best.



Improving safety requires a regional, well-funded approach. I support expanding behavioral health crisis teams, increasing the presence of trained safety personnel, improving coordination between jurisdictions, and upgrading infrastructure like lighting, restrooms, and emergency communications. We must also protect transit workers with strong reporting systems, mental health support, and real-time incident response.

Accessibility is just as essential. I strongly support the Metro Flex program—a flexible, on-demand rideshare service that allows riders to request transit within a designated area. It provides critical first/last-mile service in places without frequent fixed-route coverage and helps Metro collect real-time data to inform future transit lines and investments for transit growth. Metro Flex is designed to complement—not replace—our transit workforce, and any expansion will be done in close partnership with frontline workers.

Safety and ridership go hand in hand. I'll work with transit workers, riders, and regional partners to ensure our system is safe, accessible, and worthy of public trust.

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?

We need to act with urgency and coordination to reverse the rise in traffic deaths in South King County and across the region. I strongly support King County's adoption of the Safe System approach, which acknowledges human error is inevitable and focuses on designing safer streets and building systems with the goal of zero traffic



deaths and serious injuries. This approach is already underway in South King County: Kent is developing a data-driven Target Zero Action Plan, and Renton is improving pedestrian safety through adaptive signal technology that adjusts in real time to enhance safety and traffic flow. Other cities have adopted Neighborhood Traffic Calming Programs, aiming to improve street safety and encourage resident feedback about unsafe conditions, like speeding or cut-through traffic. As a Councilmember, I will build on this momentum in unincorporated areas by: Prioritizing sidewalk and crosswalk improvements in underserved areas; Expanding traffic calming and speed management in neighborhoods and near schools; Supporting better lighting and signage at key intersections; Focusing investments on historically underserved communities; Coordinating closely with cities to align resources and results. Improving street safety requires shared responsibility and regional leadership. I'm committed to making our streets safer and more connected for everyone.

Transit electrification plans are straining King County Metro's budget and could lead to fewer service hours and thus less ridership and more climate pollution overall as more residents drive or ride hail to work. How would you approach these tradeoffs?

I strongly support King County's long-term goal of transitioning to a zero-emissions fleet—but we must do so responsibly, without compromising transit safety, service levels, or access for the people who rely on Metro. Given the current federal landscape and limited resources for new zero-emissions investments this year, I would focus on scalable infrastructure, utility partnerships, and transparent planning to ensure we're ready when funding aligns with our climate goals. Electrification should prioritize high-ridership, high-pollution routes—where environmental and health benefits are greatest—while avoiding service cuts that push more people into



cars or rideshares. We must also prioritize the immediate safety needs of our transit system. Transit workers and riders are facing urgent challenges—from rising harassment to a lack of restrooms and safe break areas. A secure, reliable transit experience is the foundation of any climate strategy—because a system people don't feel safe using won't reduce emissions or grow ridership. I support a balanced, phased approach that centers rider and worker safety, protects essential services, and positions King County to lead on climate. This is about delivering a reliable, safe, sustainable transit system for all.

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?

Protecting King County's rural lands demands more than policies—it requires consistent enforcement and proactive stewardship. With limited enforcement capacity, we must strategically focus resources on high-risk and ecologically sensitive areas. We should also streamline enforcement processes across departments and ensure that community members can easily report violations and receive timely updates. Preventing violations is just as important. I support King County's ongoing work with farmers, landowners, and rural communities to promote stewardship, improve awareness, and make compliance more accessible. Providing technical assistance and clear guidance can reduce violations and foster a more cooperative approach to land protection. When violations do occur, we need consistent, meaningful penalties that deter repeat offenses. I also support pursuing state and federal grants to enhance enforcement capacity when possible. Our rural lands are essential to the region's environmental health, food systems, and identity.



I'm committed to smart, community-informed strategies that protect these resources while recognizing the fiscal and operational realities we face.

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 Eastside has a unique opportunity to redefine urbanism by aligning growth with livability and community identity. However, outdated land use policies and fragmented transit planning have hindered progress. To address these challenges, we should remove barriers to housing near transit by updating zoning and permitting to allow diverse housing types within a quarter-mile of high-capacity transit. Broadening the definition of transit hubs would also expand eligibility for streamlined permitting and increased density. Collaborating with cities to align local policies with shared affordable housing goals is essential. Streamlining zoning, parking, and transportation requirements would support predictable, efficient development and prevent well-intentioned rules from obstructing equitable, transit-connected housing options. Building public support for denser, walkable neighborhoods involves focusing on desired community benefits like local restaurants, cafes, pocket parks, neighborhood retail, and micromarkets. Lowering barriers to both residential and small commercial development allows these amenities to flourish together. Finally, growth must reflect King County values—sustainability, inclusion, and connection. Working closely with cities and regional transit partners ensures future development is coordinated, equitable, and serves current residents, not just newcomers.