



Michael Westgaard Urbanist Questionnaire 2025

Renton City Council, Position 1

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

My top three priorities are Housing, Transportation, and addressing Public Safety through compassionate, cost-effective solutions. First, on housing, I will use the opportunity presented by the state's limits on rent increases to implement stronger renter protections to ensure tenants know their rights and can use them. I will also build social housing on public land by leveraging the city's bonding capacity. Second, for transportation, I will work to expand mass transit throughout Renton to finally connect us to the regional system we've been excluded from even though we have felt the impacts of the increased cost of tabs. I will also explore creating a local transit agency to better serve our specific needs. Third, to improve public safety, I will use the crisis care levy to create compassionate care facilities. This addresses the root causes of crime by treating mental health and substance abuse issues, which frees our police to focus on violent crime. Protecting the Raise the Wage initiative is a crucial part of this, supporting working people and making our community safer for everyone.

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, I will champion a multi-faceted approach. We will leverage recent state laws—like removing parking minimums and allowing middle housing—to encourage diverse options. We will go further by building social housing on public land and updating our zoning code to maximize density and improve livability through better energy standards. This directly creates more homes for families of all incomes.

Engaging the public is critical for new shelters and supportive housing. We must be transparent, listen to community concerns, and find common ground, like identifying mutually agreeable locations. However, we cannot let objections entirely halt progress amidst this emergency. My approach is to balance respectful engagement with the urgent need to act, as with efforts to reopen the Red Lion as a shelter with necessary services. We will address legitimate issues while moving forward on solutions where goals overlap.

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, I support progressive revenue sources. I would use my office to make public calls for a state progressive income tax to address the state's budget shortfall. For the City of Renton, I would support targeted taxes on high earners and large corporations, though our options are limited within the city but still worth exploring.

My primary focus, however, is on innovative financing. Inspired by Girmay Zahilay, I would leverage the city's bonding capacity to build social housing on public land. This creates mixed-income housing with publicly controlled commercial space, which we can use to prioritize essential services like childcare and grocery stores, offering affordable leases to small businesses. Furthermore, I propose the city explore providing public utility services, such as telecommunications, to create competition and break monopolies, directly taking on the cost-of-living crisis. These initiatives would generate revenue while improving quality of life and setting a regional example for how cities can fund their priorities.



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 is to directly increase our housing supply, particularly with non-market options to anchor prices. This means prioritizing density and connecting new homes to transit through safe walking and biking infrastructure.

To implement this, I will work to change zoning codes to allow more housing in all neighborhoods and streamline the building process. Crucially, I will leverage the city's resources to build social housing on public land, creating homes removed from the profit motive. This must be paired with strong renter protections to keep people in their homes.

Achieving this requires building a broad coalition of urbanists, labor, and community activists to pressure local officials for change. As we build these vibrant, connected, and walkable communities, residents will see the benefits of moving away from car-dependent sprawl and embrace a more affordable, sustainable future for our city. My campaign is dedicated to leading this effort.

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?

My approach is to redesign our streets to prioritize people over cars. This requires a citywide plan focused on walkability and bikeability to connect all neighborhoods. The core strategy is to implement physical changes that force slower, safer driving. This includes narrowing roadways, adding traffic islands, raising crosswalks, and



building a connected network of sidewalks and protected bike lanes separated from vehicle traffic. By reducing speeds and creating clear, safe spaces for pedestrians and cyclists, we can dramatically reduce traffic deaths. This transformation moves us away from designs focused on car speed and comfort toward a system that safely accommodates all users, ensuring everyone can travel safely throughout our city.

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

My approach to public safety is holistic, addressing its root causes like the high cost of living, low wages, and lack of social services. Most of the property crimes we see are acts of desperation for survival, driven by poverty and a lack of resources. To actualize this, I will champion policies that keep people housed, such as strengthening renter protections. I will push to build more housing and integrate commercial spaces to bring essential services into our neighborhoods, all built by union labor. Furthermore, I will use Crisis Care Levy funding to expand mental health and substance abuse treatment services, providing a compassionate alternative to policing for those in crisis, and allowing police to focus on serious crimes. By directly tackling these economic and public health issues, we can free up law enforcement to focus on addressing violent crime, robbery, and exploitation, making our community safer for everyone.

South King

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



So far, the largest impact has been on Renton School District funding. While the city itself offers limited extra services, we are beginning to see reductions in community center programs and fewer available funds for public goods like summer camps.

To address this, my plan is twofold. First, we must protect our essential services by strategically prioritizing them in our existing budget. Second, and more importantly, we need to innovate new local revenue sources. This includes exploring progressive taxes and, more critically, leveraging the city's bonding capacity to invest in self-sustaining projects. By building social housing and commercial space on public land, we can generate new, ongoing revenue for the city to fund these vital public services, give us a level of self sufficiency, and offset federal cuts.

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?

The Sea-Tac Sustainable Airport Master Plan (SAMP) will impact Renton through increased traffic congestion and air pollution, despite not being directly within the plan. I view the expansion as part of a broader pattern of insufficient regional aviation planning that externalizes costs onto communities like ours.

To address these impacts, I will advocate for the expansion of Sounder South commuter rail services, including additional stations and improved frequency, to provide viable alternatives to road traffic. Furthermore, I will push for high-speed rail (HSR) to connect major Washington cities, reducing reliance on short-haul domestic flights, which I consider a form of climate denial. Additionally, I will ensure Renton has a strong voice in regional conversations about airport impacts, fighting against any renewed proposals for flight paths over our homes and for mitigation measures that protect our air quality and quiet neighborhoods.



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?

I am open to learning more about the specifics on this as far as violations and enforcement are concerned. I will advocate for concentrating growth within existing urban areas through densification, which reduces development pressure on rural lands. This aligns with smart growth principles that prevent environmentally and fiscally unsustainable sprawl. By reimagining our cities with more green spaces and integrating locally sourced micro-agriculture into communities, we can simultaneously enhance urban livability and reduce the demand to develop rural areas. This strategy preserves the county's rural character and ensures that protective codes are effectively maintained.

City Council

Do you support camping bans or sweeps? If elected, how would you adapt or change current law/policies to protect and support our neighbors?

No, I do not support camping bans or sweeps. They are ineffective, inhumane, and only serve to move people from place to place, destroying trust without solving the underlying problem.

My approach is to adapt policy by shifting from enforcement to solutions. I would work to build partnerships with King County, churches, and community groups to create more temporary housing options. This housing must be inclusive and low-barrier, designed to keep pets with their owners, families together, and couples united. The core of this strategy is a true "Housing First" model, where safe shelter is



paired with trauma-informed support and treatment services funded through the crisis care levy. This compassionate approach is the most effective way to protect both our unhoused neighbors and the broader community.

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

Our current comprehensive plan segregates density and growth into high-traffic corridors, which can exacerbate congestion and limit housing options. I believe we must go further.

I will push to spread that growth more equitably across the city, integrating density into neighborhoods to create vibrant, walkable communities. Crucially, this expansion must be paired with a robust plan to extend transit service to these areas, reducing our reliance on cars and ultimately limiting the need for excessive parking. This approach not only addresses traffic but also creates a more connected, sustainable, and affordable city for everyone.