Ami Nguyen
City Council District 3

1. Looking at the current City Council, on what issues would you say it has been particularly effective and, in your opinion, where has it been less effective? Why?

When evaluating the effectiveness of the council, you need to look at both the individual member that I’m running against and the council as a whole. Simply put, I cannot think of a single issue that the incumbent in my district has been effective on this term – except dividing the city and turning people against each other.

The council has devoted significant resources to increasing the stock of affordable housing and some progress has been made with implementation of HALA and the dramatic increase in funding the affordable housing ballot issue. However, supply of affordable housing has not kept up with demand as the population explodes and high-tech jobs drive up housing prices.

The council has made efforts to solve our homelessness crisis, but it’s been inadequate. An audit of Seattle’s Housing Services Department showed that efforts to address homelessness in 2018 suggests coordination between service organizations need to improve along with the need to identify newly homeless individuals and families who would have otherwise been eligible for diversion programs. In addition, the audit suggests more around the clock access to hygiene/bathrooms due to health and safety concerns. I also believe its inhumane to deny people bathrooms and showers. We need much more effort and money placed on solving our homelessness problem.

Events of the last few years have made it crystal clear that some residents and businesses feel that they aren’t being heard, and in no place is that more true than in my district where the councilmember is absent from community events and constituent services. As a councilmember, I will spend significant staff resources, as well as my own time working on constituent issues. We must restore the public’s faith in their government.

Finally, the council must increase accountability and oversight. The council must exert its oversight authority before projects escalate out of control. For example, in efforts to increase bicycle use, there was a lack of oversight in the Pronto bike share program, eroding the public trust in the city. The city should continue its efforts to improve bike accessibility, but must also maintain oversight to ensure that tax payer dollars are not wasted.

2. More than 52,000 daily transit riders from across all seven City Council districts use Third Avenue daily to get to and from their jobs in downtown Seattle. While Third Avenue acts as a front door to our downtown, it’s also the epicenter of the Seattle’s largest outdoor drug market. A recent report commissioned by DSA and neighborhood district partners has outlined a large amount of criminal activity across the city, including property crime, assaults and robberies, is being perpetrated by a
small number of prolific offenders who cycle through the criminal justice system. Have you read the report? If elected to the Seattle City Council, what policies might you pursue to curb property crime and address these issues in downtown in order to make our streets safer for all? How might you work with your elected colleagues to enact these policies?

As a public defender, I work with the most vulnerable populations each and every day. I would advocate for a housing first model – you cannot solve mental health or substance abuse issues if someone is living in a tent or tarp. I would also advocate for easier access to treatment, transitional housing and job training for individuals who have contact with the criminal justice system. In working with my elected colleagues, I would present examples of how treatment reduces recidivism rather than repeated jailing without any treatment.

3. Homelessness continues to be the top issue facing Seattle, yet we have made little progress toward housing our homeless population. In your estimation, what is the City’s role in addressing this crisis? Where would you spend your energy, leadership and resources to have the greatest impact?

Homelessness is a regional issue that requires regional solutions. The new joint King County/Seattle approach is long overdue.

It is the City Council’s duty to find a solution to Seattle’s homelessness crisis. I would commit my time addressing the problems and solutions highlighted in the Seattle’s Housing Services Department audit report. This would include investing in a software for resource organizations to communicate and collaborate and funding more around the clock hygiene/bathroom centers. In addition, I would work on funding working training programs for homeless and formerly homeless individuals and collaborate with employers to hire homeless individuals and/or individuals with criminal records.

4. Seattle’s lack of housing options that are affordable to our low- and moderate-income employees is an important issue for DSA and its members. In the wake of MHA passing at Council, what kinds of new policies would you pursue to help expand the availability of affordable housing in Seattle? How might current zoning fit into your thinking? Who would you imagine working with to enact these policies?

Creating affordable housing should be accessible to residents as much as it is to commercial developers. Unfortunately, in this past decade, most new housing constructed has been luxury housing. Almost a quarter of Seattle residents spend more than HALF of their income on housing, primarily rent. We need more affordable housing to address homelessness, to keep seniors in Seattle, and to address climate change – most emissions in Seattle are from transportation.

The city should create policies that make construction of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and detached accessory dwelling units (DADUs) more accessible for residents. I would imagine working with residents, land use attorneys, architects and general contractors about how the city can make development of ADUs and DADUs more accessible. For example, having a free database of sample blue prints from an architect may reduce the time and cost for residents to construct ADUs and DADUs.
5. Between 2010 to 2018, downtown Seattle added over 85,000 jobs. During this time, we have seen a major shift in how the majority of people get to and around downtown, with percentage of people driving alone to their jobs shrinking to roughly 25%. Still, as the regional transportation and economic hub, downtown street space is at a premium. What steps do we need to take over the next two-to-four years to ensure that people can access downtown and that our streets work well for all users?

Access to and through Downtown is important for all of Seattle, given its role as the hub of the region and major employment center. With removal of the Viaduct, additional buses on Downtown streets and the construction of a major addition to the Convention Center, access to Downtown is essential. The arrival of light rail to Northgate in 2021 and East Link in 2023 will help a lot, but we can’t wait for then.

One area where we need to partner with King County is on solving the first and last mile problem, meaning the short distances that people need to travel to get to light rail or bus routes. King County Metro is experimenting with an innovate program to bring more residents to light rail. If that is successful, I’d like to work with King County to expand it into Seattle.

The additional bus service approved by Seattle voters in 2014, for 2015 through 2020, must be renewed. If not renewed, we face a precipitous reduction in bus service in 2020. This is funding critically needed for Rapid Ride bus routes.

We should survey drivers why they have decided to drive rather than take public transportation. If responses reflect an area where public transportation is inaccessible or unreliable, then the City should work with King County to improve public transportation access to that area. I would also recommend having government service branches in neighborhoods rather than concentrating all services to just downtown. This would not only allow greater accessibility to government services, but also alleviate car congestion in downtown.

6. DSA currently manages and activates Westlake and Occidental Square Parks through an agreement with the City, which has allowed us to bring furniture, programming, staffing and security into these parks, as we work to make them welcoming for all. We also manage McGraw Square with some of the same types of activities. What is your view of this type of public/private partnership as the City contemplates major new public space opportunities along the waterfront and above Interstate-5?

This program has really enhanced the experience of being downtown. This form of Public and Private partnerships is beneficial for the community and I’d look to expand it. We would need to ensure that access and use of the parks are non-discriminatory and equitable.

7. Downtown Seattle is the economic center of the region, with large and small businesses employing more than 300,000 people. However, economic success for employers and employees are continuously strained by unpredictable and burdensome regulations and taxes being imposed
at the city level. How will you work to ensure that there is more predictability and consideration for employers to support growth in jobs, retail, restaurants and investment in downtown?

I would sit down with representatives from each group privately to learn about their concerns, and then meet as a larger group with each stakeholder in the room. This would allow me and the other eight Council Members to understand how we can provide the smoothest transition for employers and employees into new policies.

8. In 2015, a city report looked at Seattle’s commercial development capacity and determined we could absorb another 115,000 jobs by 2035. Yet, in the last three years alone, we have added over 23,000 jobs, indicating that we are likely to surpass our growth targets much earlier than anticipated. Seattle has limited existing zoning capacity, and inadequate permitting systems in place to accommodate the future demand for commercial development. Where might you look to expand our city’s capacity in this regard?

The recently passed MHA legislation is added zoning will allow the City to build an estimated 6,000 affordable units, in addition to 30,000 market rate units, over the next 10 years. This added development capacity will also support commercial development. I think it’s important that, before making more changes, we monitor the development that occurs in the early implementation of MHA and make changes based off our learned experience.

Finally, the long delays at the Department of Construction and Inspection (SDCI) is unacceptable to me.

9. As the City strives to allocate limited resources to manage and activate our complex urban environment, it has increasingly turned to Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) for support. These BIAs build community capacity and give agency and tools to local communities to address their own priorities. What is your view of these groups and their impact?

BIAs have had a positive impact on Seattle. They are a great way for communities to have more autonomy over their space. It is important to set up systems to ensure that BIAs represent the local community rather than just a small, vocal group. This includes providing interpreters and translated materials.

10. Downtown is not only one of the fastest-growing residential neighborhood in the region, but also the jobs center of Seattle. If you are elected to serve on the City Council, how would you go about balancing the needs of your district with the City has a whole? What are the top issues facing your district and how do you see them intersecting with the issues at play in downtown?

District representation is a great way for city-wide and district level issues to be addressed. District representation ensures that historically marginalized communities are more fairly represented. I see the needs of my District also as needs of Seattle as a whole. Balancing the issues would mean each Council Member is given the same opportunity to address their District’s issues as the other Districts.
Many of the residents of my district work downtown, and downtown pays the most taxes of any council district. Affordable housing and homelessness are top issues facing District and downtown.

Solutions need to be shared equally throughout the city so that low-income and affordable housing is not concentrated in one neighborhood or District.

It would also be beneficial for District 3 and downtown to collaborate on opportunities for small businesses. Seattle should foster 24-hour neighborhoods between Capitol Hill/First Hill and Downtown. For now, Downtown is busy during business hours, but empty during the evening whereas Capitol Hill is busy during the evening, but much less lively during the daytime. It would be beneficial to have a mixture of businesses so that Capital Hill/First Hill and Downtown can be lively throughout the day.