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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?

MHA has been a success, and finally pushing it over the finish line was a huge win for Seattle. There have been few other clearly effective policy outcomes from the council this year. Several other accomplishments have been positive but still deeply flawed. For example, the Council approved a desperately needed public safety contract, but undermined police accountability controls in the process.

Conversely, homelessness and housing unaffordability are both at crisis levels the city hasn’t seen in almost 100 years. No council member has proposed any policies that will credibly and significantly address either issue. The Seattle Police Department is severely understaffed and not operating efficiently; violent crime is up significantly in D3 and there has not been a clear response from the city. Seattle City Light rates are projected to rise faster than inflation for the foreseeable future, placing residential rates well above average for the nation. Seattle’s traffic and transportation are getting increasingly gridlocked without any vision or even coherent strategy to address mobility in the city. Transit projects are apparently arbitrarily delayed or cancelled since a guiding vision or strategy has not been articulated by the city.

I think the City Council has a serial problem in their approach to problem solving. They fail to quantify the nature of the issue before jumping to solutions. That results in solutions that cannot possibly address the issue they think they are solving. An encapsulated example of this is the plastic straw ban. Plastic straws make up a vanishingly tiny portion of the plastic waste stream. As a practical matter, passing a straw ban does absolutely nothing material to save the environment. At the same time, it makes life significantly more difficult for people with physical disabilities who require plastic straws to drink hot liquids (no commercial alternative currently exists). If the council quantified the problem of plastic pollution before spending time on a solution, they would have chosen a completely different approach.

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?
I have read Scott Lindsey’s report. There are clear deficiencies in our handling of crime and criminals with complicating factors. The most glaring for me was the example of an individual that was too mentally ill to stand trial, but not mentally ill enough to be involuntarily committed. It is absolutely unacceptable and unsafe to leave someone with significant mental illness out on the streets without treatment, set up to serially commit crimes.

As a council member, I will work with the many stakeholders to close the smaller gaps that should be repairable with coordination (such as ensuring anyone released from jail that is homeless is discharged to a shelter), and work with other legislative bodies (the KC Council and State Legislature) to close the more significant gaps in mental health services for incarcerated individuals.

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?

King County is facing a homelessness rate of about 0.5%, in line with other West Coast cities (SF - 0.85%, LA - 0.54%, PDX - 0.63%). While we can and should reduce this rate through policy improvements (particularly land use, see Q4), we should expect that we will need to provide services for about 13,000 unsheltered individuals county-wide on an ongoing basis. Right now, we provide shelter (and related services) to only 6,000 individuals—6,500 bed deficit.

Evidence shows that the Housing First model is the most effective way to address the compounding issues (mental & physical health, addiction disorders, etc) for those experiencing homelessness. As such, I see closing the 6,500 bed deficit as the highest priority for addressing homelessness in the region. We will need to be thoughtful about how we expand services to provide a continuum of care. Some individuals will be able to exit into self-sufficiency, others will need community support in some form on a continuous basis. Our expansion of services will need to be matched carefully to the needs of each underserved cohort of homeless individuals.

It is also worth noting that New York City spends approximately $230 per capita per year on homeless services while the King County area spends approximately $95 per capita per year. In essence, we are funding a cut rate level of services and are receiving cut rate quality of service. I do expect we can use our existing resources more efficiently, and there are significant deficits in monitoring and accountability for some of our contracted service providers; both issues I intend to address. I do expect, however, that once we have improved the efficacy of our existing spending, we will need to return to the voters for additional revenues if we wish to truly address homelessness. Homelessness is a region-wide issue and will require coordination with the county and neighboring cities and towns, so additional discussion will be necessary before we can identify the best route forward on this front.
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?

Seattle is in the midst of a severe housing shortage. From 2011 to 2018, Seattle added over 100,000 workers to downtown alone (according to my sources). During the same time period, Seattle added only 30,000 homes within the city limits. Where are the other 70,000 workers and their families supposed to live if we don’t add more homes? The answer is that they either displace existing residents, or they are forced to commute from outside the city, adding to our severe traffic and pollution woes.

I propose returning all Seattle neighborhoods to their original roots. Neighborhoods that were platted prior to segregation-driven zoning policies allowed modest multi-family housing on all parcels. That is, it was legal to build duplexes, triplexes, and small multifamily buildings in every neighborhood. Indeed, in the older neighborhoods, about 30% of the homes are multifamily to this day even though the neighborhood is ostensibly now single family only. We should legalize multifamily in 100% of the city with appropriate controls on architectural style to ensure neighborhoods retain their character as they grow. A very modest addition of one triplex per block would add 35,000 housing units to the city’s supply.

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?

We've added over 85,000 jobs to downtown Seattle, but we haven’t added (and indeed we cannot add) 85,000 cars' worth of road capacity to downtown. With almost 80,000 daily riders, Link Light Rail is also already at crush load during rush hour. King County Metro is also under a capacity crunch; all extant bus bases are full so Metro will not be able to deploy materially more service for 5-10 years while they build a new bus base. We will need to be creative at the city to keep our city mobile.

First, we need to make the most of what we have. SDOT must invest in bus lanes, queue jumps, and signal priority so that we can keep our existing bus fleet moving as fast and efficiently as possible. Second, we need to legalize scooter rental fleets. Uber & Lyft constitute up to 15% of downtown traffic, and we know that scooters are frequently used instead of a taxi trip in cities where they’re available. Roughly, scooters could reduce automotive traffic by up to 5%. Finally, we need to fully implement the Bike Master Plan and connect downtown to adjacent residential neighborhoods with safe protected bike
lanes. Bicycles move considerably more people in significantly less road space and are becoming much more popular in hilly cities like Seattle with the advent of low cost e-bikes. Giving workers living nearby a safe alternative to driving or taking the bus frees road and transit capacity for workers living farther away that don’t have those options available to them.

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?

Commerce, entertainment, and amenities are key to activating public space. It’s entirely predictable that the Pike Place Market is the most crowded public area in city since it has a high density of all three of these things. I strongly support alliances with private private providers of services to make public areas useful and compelling spaces for the residents of the city and tourists who visit.

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?

As a small business owner myself, I am no stranger to the sometimes byzantine maze we must navigate simply to get a permit or pay our taxes. We were also subject to a “surprise” $2000 increase in the cost of our business license that the council passed in the dead of night without telling anyone. We first heard of it in an email on December 30th, two days before it went into effect. The antipathy of the city towards businesses is something I also experience firsthand and is unacceptable.

One of my four key values is “Transparency and Accountability,” and to me that means that the residents of the city have the right to weigh in on city policy before it is enacted. A council that is governing responsibly should not need to spring tax increases or regulatory burdens on the community without discussion and balance.

The council has also consistently failed to prioritize efficiency within the departments. For example businesses that apply for permits at SDCI, face long wait times and unacceptably high costs. Residents of the city ultimately pay these costs, and inefficiency this hurts us all.
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?

As I noted in Question 4, we must find space for these 115,000 new workers and their families to live. That means ending the prohibition on duplexes, triplexes and other multifamily housing that the city disastrously embarked upon during the era of segregation and has reinforced ever since. As I noted in Question 7, we cannot allow inefficient and expensive permitting processes hold up the construction of the housing and infrastructure the city needs to serve these new neighbors.

We also need to be aggressively investing in transit capacity to bedroom communities outside the city limits. To the extent we cannot build enough housing for every last new worker in the city, we need to provide transit connections to nearby communities that can supply that housing. We could, for example, offer to subsidize bus service to an adjacent city using Transportation Benefit District funds concomitant with that city forming a new urban village or upzoning an existing one.

On permitting, my observation is that the council has never prioritized efficiency in the construction-related departments because they have a strong mentality that “developers deserve to pay,” without realizing that the money ultimately comes out of our wallets as the consumers in this city. I intend to reverse this backwards thinking and as part of my oversight role, ensure every department is focused on effectively facilitating the coming growth in this city.

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?

I support BIAs as a critical tool in the toolbox to improve the quality of life for people who live and work in Seattle. I do not consider them a substitute for effective governance from the city.

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 3’s top issues are largely the same issues facing the rest of the city: housing affordability, homelessness, transportation, public safety, and access to child care. The residents of the district do not believe their responsibility to their community ends at the district boundary and as their representative,
neither do I. As a district representative, I do consider it paramount that I be the subject matter expert on how the solutions to each of challenges the city faces apply to my district. For example, among SDOT projects, transit and bike paths will be much more important to District 3 whereas I expect sidewalk installation will likely be more important to District 5. My job will be to ensure that as the city implements programs and policies, the specifics and details match the needs unique to my district.