

Seattle City Council Confirmation Questions

Maiko Winkler-Chin – Director, Office of Housing

My comments below use the word “we” often. “We” means the Executive branch – the Mayor, their executive offices (including OH) and City departments; the Legislative branch – City Council, legislative assistants, and Central staff. We work on behalf of those who call Seattle home. This is my orientation to this new role.

1. What are your major goals for the Office of Housing over the next several years? What 3 you see as the primary challenges facing the Office of Housing over the next several years?

- **Send the 2023 Housing Levy to voters** – we need to work together to achieve this goal and ensure the 2023 Housing Levy reflects a bold solution for Seattle’s affordable housing needs now and in the coming years. Let us go into our joint work knowing it will be tough and challenging. We will have questions, we may disagree, and we will need to work together knowing that no levy is a “sure thing”. Through our work together, we will have productive conversations about how this critical resource differs from and interacts with other available resources, and how we will prioritize all of these to help house people in need.
- **Explicitly add a community development lens to our housing investments** – as we have demonstrated over the past 40 years, our housing investments can lead to strong outcomes not just for the residents of the development, but also for the neighborhoods in which our investments are placed. We can continue to emphasize this broader community benefit through intentional conversations about “housing AND...” which is reflective of my community development background.
- **Ensure that the Office of Housing is strong and healthy so the people who do the work, and the assets we steward, are best serving the people of Seattle** – the Office will have over 60% new staff between vacancies to be filled and newly created positions. In order for the Office to be successful, the people who work at the Office must develop as a team – improve clarity of our collective work and operate with shared values and a clear picture of what success looks like.

2. What is your general philosophy for how to most effectively work with City Council? How will you be responsive to Council requests, in particular regarding priorities that differ with those of the Executive branch?

I would like to build a collaborative relationship that is based on regular communication; respect for our roles, and trust; where we jointly understand what we hope to accomplish and achieve in service to the people of our city. When we differ in opinions – and we will – I hope we listen and try to understand each other so we can jointly problem solve. While I work in the Executive branch and report up to the Mayor, Mayor Harrell encourages an open and collaborative relationship between Cabinet members and Council. I intend to work closely with Council and staff, as I have for many years, because the best work often involves listening to others’ ideas and working through issues to come up with the best solutions.

3. How will you ensure that Council members and Legislative staff receive timely information needed from your department for Council to make sound policy and budgetary decisions?

The city benefits when Council makes informed policy and budgetary decisions, and that means OH's role is to get Council the information they need in a timely manner. Understanding the information request – the why – is important. I have heard from staff who work in policy areas that they would like to be more involved in the deliberative space of creating the policy – of thinking through the issue that the policy is trying to address. I would like to explore this for staff work satisfaction and to build upon staff expertise.

Other than having OH staff provide timely information to Council, we also need the right data tools, which we are starting to plan and implement this year.

4. What is your vision for Office of Housing coordination with the city's Department of Human Services, Seattle Housing Authority, regional partners, and the King County Regional Homelessness Authority to reduce homelessness in Seattle and the region?

Quite simply, we know that housing is what ends homelessness. We will produce housing and bring people inside in partnership with these key entities in our region. We will build as much housing as we can – as much as the funding environment allows, and as much as the provider community supports – to contribute to the important cause of reducing homelessness.

We need to coordinate to improve our existing work and develop trust and confidence with each other as we jointly seek to access resources – money, time, and ideas. We have smart and talented people in these entities, but they may be asked to work and think differently as the different organizational roles intersect. I look forward to continued work with these partners, and ongoing learning as I explore and further define the role of OH in this effort.

5. In your position, how will you promote racial and social equity? Can you provide some specific examples?

I feel that much of my work life has been focused towards the goal of equity. It is not a term I grew up with or used until recently, but it is a thread that runs through my past 25+ years.

In my 2 months in OH, I hear “equity” often, but I am not sure if we as a team have a common definition, which is necessary so we can examine our work – our programs and processes – through that lens. I'm bringing my staff together to build a common definition, which is needed soon because our team is exponentially growing.

Since I have been at OH, some of my most interesting conversations have been with the Change Team, which includes 25% of staff across the Office. They have been promoting equity at OH, and I would like to work with them to set measurable goals around our equity work. I am excited about working with and supporting them as we together make our organization stronger.

I look forward to ensuring that we live our definition of equity as we develop the proposal for the 2023 Housing Levy, create, evaluate, and award our upcoming project RFPs, assess recently

implemented policies, and as the Executive and Council hold OH accountable and highlight areas for improvement.

6. What opportunities do you see to promote equitable, community-driven affordable housing development rooted in and serving communities most at risk of displacement in Seattle?

This question goes back to one of my goals. I see an investment by OH as an invitation to consider other City investments in this place. What else could be there – childcare, small businesses, other public benefits? Which City departments help inform and support our work – where do we choose to invest? Who do we work with to help do the “housing AND…” work?

For some projects – for example, the site in the Mt. Baker light rail station area – we need to explore the most creative approach to developing the site, including an examination of how we can implement what we hear from community, how we create the best conditions to produce the most positive outcomes for both residents and the broader community, and how we learn to do this work better with each project. As with equity work, this more expansive type of community development can require more process and time, but I see this work as critical to building resilient and equitable neighborhoods.

7. How will you promote and support developers to use community preference/affirmative marketing policies in their new developments?

All Office of Housing-funded projects should be affirmatively marketed per policy. There is confusion around what “affirmative marketing” means – honestly, I was confused between governmental agencies (specifically OH/SOCR and HUD) because that process was defined very differently depending on the agency. We have an opportunity to further evaluate affirmative marketing practices across agencies and continue to improve these practices through more clearly defined guidelines in our Housing Funding Policies.

The community preference program, developed to potentially disrupt displacement, is new but has been implemented in a couple completed OH-funded buildings. I recognize that some owners, developers, and/or investors may be concerned about using this new policy. If developments are resistant to using the community preference, OH needs to understand why. We could then design ways to improve or adjust the policy to achieve the performance we seek.

8. What are some innovative opportunities you have identified to strengthen and expand OH’s core work of providing permanently affordable housing at 0-30% AMI and between 30-60% AMI?

I believe innovation requires resources (especially time), trust between partners, and a tolerance for failure and reexamination. If we fail in this process of innovation, we need to remedy the situations, which often cost money, reputation, trust and perhaps pride. This innovation process may be challenging for governmental entities. I could take this question as an invitation from Council for OH to experiment, to “design/do” projects to learn along the way, and I welcome that if that is the case.

I view innovation as the compilation of ideas I hear from those smart people around me. I am curious, I like to learn, I often “talk story” with others to explore what they are learning and brainstorm the possibilities with experts working on the ground. OH has very smart, dedicated, creative people who want to serve our communities; my role is to listen, ask clarifying questions, clear barriers, and support them in their work.

In the past few years, the world turned upside down, and people at OH tried new ways of working and investing in projects, and we held a sense of urgency. I hope we can carry some of this energy forward as we tackle issues in our work, such as trying to shorten the time it takes to build housing (getting units open quicker, reducing time to save money); acquiring new buildings and looking to purchase more; decreasing displacement (and bringing back those already displaced) through creating permanently affordable homeownership; working with organizations to steward our joint asset (our properties); trying new policies to improve outcomes; and publicly bidding properties for developments that intentionally meet a broad range of public goals.

I am looking forward to the conversations with Council, OH staff, our communities, and our extended community of those who are experts in housing across the country. It is in those types of conversations that I gain energy and learn, and from which we can come up with adaptive solutions.

9. How do you balance the need to invest in housing for the lowest income workers (0-30% AMI) and the desire to make progress on middle income housing? How will you leverage OH resources to meet the specific housing needs of diverse communities in Seattle? Can you provide some examples?

People who work in our city should be able to live here. OH will continue using its existing financial resources to serve the lowest income residents – at properties that need that resources for sustainability.

We need to work with partners – City departments and all sectors (public, private, and not for profit) – to create and utilize all the tools we can. The tools will not be the same for 0-30% AMI housing as it may be for housing offered for people with higher incomes. As a city, the information around the specific housing needs of diverse communities sits in various workgroups. Our office needs to listen and understand so we can help determine how to meet the need. Our staff are known as technical experts, and we need to apply that expertise alongside community knowledge to improve housing affordability across the city.

I hope we can pursue demonstration projects with unconventional partners. Not everything is going to work out the way we plan (see question #8 above), and we will always look at the data. We should also revisit past recommendations around affordability and livability in our city to see how applicable those recommendations remain and consider what other methods to explore.

10. What opportunities do you see to increase OH’s activity in preserving existing affordable housing by removing it from the speculative market?

OH has historically tracked properties exiting Section 8 and other programs with an eye towards acquisition. The City's Notice of Intent to Sell policy and Rapid Acquisition program will continue, and OH will continue examining how these programs have worked and how we need to adjust different aspects of these policies to achieve the best possible outcomes.

OH will continue to ensure that our communities are aware of OH funding to support low-income homeowners to maintain their homes and provide weatherization assistance to stabilize homeowners and enable them to remain in their homes.

Seattle is not alone – and I will look to our peer cities, particularly high-cost cities along the west coast, to explore the work they have done and examine the ways we may apply their learnings in Seattle.

11. What are your thoughts about how to support affordable housing providers and residents who have been impacted by the pandemic, and what lessons learned can be drawn to help strengthen our affordable housing system against future crises?

Having worked in the field, we have really experienced numerous crises since 2020 –increasing homelessness, public safety concerns, behavioral health system challenges, racial justice reckoning, anti-Asian hate, severe workforce shortages among housing providers, extreme heat, wildfire smoke, etc. Some of these crises existed before COVID-19 but became much more evident over the past two years. These crises have all been felt and experienced throughout our portfolio of city-funded and regulated affordable housing, and they are not over yet.

OH served as an information source and resource deployer. That is what OH does, but the Office stepped in to deploy additional resources, such as rental assistance and capacity building funds. The past few years have shaped the way providers and OH think about how spaces are developed, and the systems that serve the properties (e.g., air filtration, cooling and heating, internet access, food access, common areas). OH is committed to working directly with providers to hear about the impacts of the pandemic and these numerous crises, and to collectively develop our work to address these challenges.

12. How will you work with the Council to ensure continued resources for resident services and other vital programs to support affordable housing residents?

As someone who advocated for resident services, this remains a needed resource for both residents and property operations staff. At OH, we see the needs for adequate services to support residents across the full continuum of housing in which we invest. OH will work with Council to ensure resources to support our residents, by learning from our current investments in services and capacity building, convening provider conversations, helping articulate the outcomes of these services, and ensuring that the multiple fractured systems that exacerbate challenges in our affordable housing investments are known and hopefully addressed.

13. What steps will you take to prepare Seattle's affordable housing system for equitable expansion as new resources come online?

To promote equitable expansion, OH will improve transparency around the criteria necessary for an organization or project to receive investment. Having worked at an organization that was not seen as “fundable” in the traditional leveraged system, I have strong feelings about this work and will work hard to be objective in this area.

In terms of new resources, I appreciate the new Payroll Expense Tax revenue because I believe it encourages OH to work with non-traditional groups to meet their community’s housing and development goals. The Office has started this work with the new JumpStart Acquisition & Preservation Program that offers capacity building dollars and access to a distinct loan fund. The capacity building and training will allow organizations to make educated decisions on their path towards developing and stewarding assets. This program places OH in a different role and relationship with a new set of organizations and by creating this program, I believe we are becoming more transparent in our requirements.

I believe we will see different types of projects than we have seen in recent history, and I am looking forward to working on this new program and defining what success looks like with these new resources.

This work requires OH to be fully staffed to support organizations and policy development, and I thank Council for supporting the added positions and resources.

14. How do you see the City’s investment in homeownership development evolving in the coming years?

Housing is foundational to a family’s success, and permanently affordable homeownership is critical in our work to prevent displacement, as well as promote asset building. Government programs have harmed certain communities, including my own (my home has a racial covenant – it of course is no longer in effect and is an artifact of the recent past). I see homeownership investments increasing, but they may look different. We will continue looking for land and exploring partnerships with other public agencies for sites to develop. We have developed permanently affordable townhomes and cottages, and we may see new models, such as condos, co-operative ownership models, and other new forms to meet our communities’ needs.

15. What are your priorities and thoughts about including higher labor standards on affordable housing development efforts around the city—including opportunities for workers to enter a career in the construction industry; opportunities within contracting processes for women, members of the BIPOC community, and economically distressed communities; and accountability for contractors and subcontractors to decrease wage theft and other violations on Office of Housing projects—and where have you seen higher labor standards be included and be successful?

Our investments should create public benefits beyond the creation of units, extending beyond the construction period and into the life of the property. Our investments should create opportunities for economic benefit to our residents – those that live in OH-invested buildings, and the neighborhoods that surround them – to access careers and create business opportunities. There should be a pipeline of projects for them to work on in their city. If this is a

goal that we agree on, we should explore it with our partners – those that develop, operate, and work on our investment – determine what our desired outcomes should be, and implement new ways of working.

Wage theft is absolutely unacceptable, and should be enforced by the Office of Labor Standards, no matter the project.

OH relies on a diverse array of workers to build and operate our affordable housing portfolio, and I look forward to exploring how we can better support all the employees in our ecosystem to thrive.

16. As the Director of Office of Housing what steps would you take to ensure as many affordable housing units as possible are filled?

Ensuring that our affordable housing portfolio is fully utilized is mission critical to our department. We are committed to housing as many people as possible with this precious housing resource that we steward.

The OH vacancy rate target includes the time needed for unit turns between different occupants, and this time is often dependent on staffing and availability of supplies and contractors to repair and maintain properties.

As mentioned in question #11, we are living through a very difficult time, which has deeply impacted people experiencing homelessness and poverty, residents of our affordable housing portfolio, and organizations themselves. There are significant supply chain challenges that are currently impacting maintenance of properties across the city, there are significant rental arrears at existing properties, and there are staff shortages onsite and among contractors. We are working alongside our affordable housing partners to ensure that units are fully utilized, and we know it is also mission critical for our affordable housing providers to achieve the highest occupancy standards possible to serve people in need.

OH employs an asset management team that regularly monitors our affordable housing projects to ensure compliance with numerous regulations and hold operators accountable to specific metrics, such as vacancy rates. We work very closely with providers to provide technical assistance and support when metrics fall below expectations.

17. How you will ensure that residents of all neighborhoods and districts, throughout the city, benefit from new affordable rental housing units?

Every neighborhood should have affordable housing options – it's part of the promise of the Fair Housing Act. The recent OH Annual Investments Report presentation to Council's Finance & Housing Committee highlight areas of success and opportunity for improvement. The City's Comprehensive Plan process and the 2023 Housing Levy development efforts, as well as conversation around major policy areas, will lead to action to address this issue. We must be deliberate in planning for geographical spread and investing in different housing types in order to shape our strategy and implementation plan.

18. What specific and measurable outcomes should the Office of Housing look to when measuring success?

In the time since I've been at the Office of Housing, it's clear that the following outcomes should be used to measure success:

- Outcomes for our different housing programs and policies, including the number of new homes developed and added to the permanently affordable housing portfolio, the outcomes for residents living in those homes, the efficiency of organizations operating those homes, and the impact felt by different policies managed by OH
- Equity metrics around our investments and the outcomes for residents in our affordable housing portfolio, to be further developed with the OH Change Team
- Outcomes in the area of homelessness to be developed with our providers and funding partners

I expect the list of goals will continue to be refined based on upcoming conversations with the Executive, Council, and our stakeholders.

19. What are your thoughts on the outcomes of the current Housing Levy (# of units produced, # of units in the pipeline, # of units projected to be completed, income levels served, etc.) and opportunities to build on this work through the upcoming Housing Levy renewal?

- We have exceeded or are on track to meet our 2016 goals, which is incredible.
- We must reflect on how we are currently performing, what we need to improve, and what new outcomes and related metrics should be.
 - I look forward to examining the unit count metric, which may not adequately capture or support the development of different bedroom sizes, for example, or adequately reflect equity outcomes.
 - I also look forward to future conversations around the concept of leverage of other fund sources, the ways that OH maximizes other funding opportunities, and the methods that OH uses to deploy the resources efficiently and effectively.
- As a community developer, I hope that we jointly create goals and outcomes to sustain community resilience in all our city's neighborhoods.