

Kathy Nyland
Mayor Nominee for Director
Seattle Department of Neighborhoods
Responses to Confirmation Questions

1. What are your specific goals for the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) over the next four years? What do you see as the primary challenges facing the DON over the next four years?

My goal is to assess and address the department's immediate needs and then develop a long term strategy so DON remains a valued resource within the city and within communities.

At the end of the day, people want to know what we are doing and where we are going- both inside and outside the department. My job is to provide clarity and direction and the space and guidance so people can run with ideas, flourish, and succeed. The Department of Neighborhood has a rich history. My goal is to make sure its future is just as rich and impactful.

What are my specific goals?

- **Revisit our mission.** The Department of Neighborhoods was created almost 30 years ago around the concept of "community building". This mission is reflected in many of the city's programs. We need to determine what community building looks like now, three decades from our inception, and provide a level of service that meets that expectation.
- **Broaden the access points for participation in our programs.** Currently, much of our outreach efforts revolve around an evening meeting in a community center. While that works for some, it does not work for most. We need to update our approaches to engagement so people from diverse backgrounds, ages and socio economic status can participate, on their timeline, from their desired location.
- **Collaborate with other City departments.** DON is connected to communities. It can assist in coordinating community meetings amongst departments, and streamline outreach efforts. With more collaboration amongst departments, we can shift from exhaustive outreach to intensive and intentional.

What do I see as the primary challenges?

- **Our mission.** We are a department steeped in tradition. Our founding principles should be honored as we move forward. By doing things differently, we aren't abandoning the past but we are ensuring our future.
- **Morale.** The department has been in a state of limbo for quite some time and that has an impact on staff. This transition in leadership can be a catalyst for change, and the department is poised for a culture of creativity and innovation.

- **Bandwidth and resources.** Like most departments, DON has felt its share of reductions because of past budget constraints. The work still gets done despite the fact there are less people to do it. Capacity is something to be mindful of as we develop our priorities.
- **District Elections.** District elections will have an impact on the Department of Neighborhoods. Understanding how we will be impacted and preparing for such an impact is a definite challenge.

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 may differ with those of the Executive branch?*

My philosophy to working effectively with City Council is to be responsive, reliable, and accessible. As I've demonstrated this in these past few weeks, I will proactively reach out to Councilmembers to provide information and answer questions. I'll provide Council with project updates, and flag potential issues so you are aware. And I will continue to provide the Seattle Public Utilities and Neighborhoods Committee with monthly Director's Reports like I did on my sixth day on the job!

3. *How will you work with other Departments such as Parks and SDOT to achieve the goals of the City? How about outside stakeholders?*

The working relationship between DON and other departments is what excites me most about this role. As someone who worked in her community, I saw firsthand how the city does outreach and conducts public meetings. This is an opportunity to examine our processes. Currently, the city's approach to outreach and engagement is often described as checking a box. We can do things differently.

I've met with and will continue to meet with internal and external stakeholders to learn about their priorities. That feedback is crucial and will help us evaluate our services.

Many of the priorities of our city span across departments, so our approach needs to be just as expansive as we reach out into the community. We need to remember that just because an issue is new to us does not mean it is new to the community. Imagine if we went to communities and continued conversations rather than started over with each meeting or each issue.

I've already had conversations with several departments about how we can help one another. The better we can coordinate internally amongst city staff, the better coordinated we'll be in our neighborhoods. Such an approach would be more effective and efficient but also more respectful and more meaningful to those we are engaging.

The heart of this department is relationships. I look forward to forging and maintaining relationships with a wide array of community partners, and bringing more people, and voices, to the table.

4. *Using Neighborhood Greenways and green gardens as an example, how will DON act as a leader to promote neighborhood connections and coordinate with other departments?*

The Neighborhood Matching Fund program is the vehicle where people can turn to implement their ideas. It's the program that helps create the communities people want and envision. This could be projects that are "physical" such as greenways and green gardens, but these funds can also be used for less tangible projects such as community building, educational, or cultural in nature.

The core of the NMF program is making connections in the truest definition of the word. And DON's role is connecting and building relationships.

A great example is how DON and SDOT have collaborated over the years in regards to the NMF program and the support of greenways. Several applications have been received over time asking for funding to support predevelopment work or scoping of possible greenway enhancement projects. Because these types of projects are so popular, the departments worked together to develop a FAQ sheet several years back – to assist applicants in the process.

DON seeks these partnerships to enhance the way we respond to community concerns and interests. Our department is here to serve the community and we want to provide the services that are wanted and needed.

5. *Significant grant funding for park and neighborhood programs is available outside the city. How will you work with other departments to apply for and receive available funds?*

Outside funding can be a valuable asset to projects, particularly capital projects, and can play a big role in getting a project from idea to implementation. DON will be of assistance when possible outside funding source opportunities arise. In the meantime, we will devote resources to coordinating and aligning the funding opportunities that are offered within DON and the many other funding opportunities offered throughout other city departments. We want to make sure that we are leveraging these opportunities to the fullest extent, and in the most equitable way possible.

6. *What is your organizational management approach? How will you review internal operations at DON to determine if they warrant improvement? What is your leadership approach?*

I am going to take some time to listen, learn and assess. Review what we do and how we do it. I am also looking at our organizational structure. I plan to meet with staff and internal and external stakeholders to get their feedback on the delivery of our services and programs. My management style is simple: set and communicate clear expectations, challenge people to grow professionally, and treat people fairly. The size of our department provides us the opportunity to be cross-functional within and across divisions. I want this department to be a team, where staff trust and learn from one another.

To be successful, we need well-defined channels of communication and responsibilities. We need to improve productivity by minimizing duplication. We need to lift morale and deliver excellence in our work. I see the role of director as the person who sets expectations, articulates the vision, and sets-up staff to succeed so they can achieve our desired outcomes.

7. Give an example of your strategic planning abilities and explain the result. What did you learn?

Prior to working in government, I spent quite a bit of time learning how government works. I got hands-on experience by working on various issues in my neighborhood including Southwest Airlines possible move to Boeing Field, the decision to build a transfer station or promote a zero-waste strategy and the proposed designation of a cabaret zone. Each of these provided valuable lessons in how our city works.

They say luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity. I believe in being prepared and creating opportunities. All it takes is getting a toe in the door.

Sometimes the toe in the door is one of the city's very own studies. In the case of Airport Way South rechannelization, that was precisely the case. In 2007, our burgeoning business district was suffering from high speeds of traffic. We needed help, but kept getting told that due high volume of traffic along AWS, a road diet was impossible.

Just so happened, I came across the feasibility study SDOT conducted along Rainier Avenue South. With highlighter in hand, I scoured every word of that report, flagging, tabbing and committing details to memory. I then inquired about the possibility of a road diet in my neighborhood, along Airport Way South (AWS). I was told that was impossible for a variety of reasons. I quickly pointed out that the city studied Rainier Avenue even though the volume of traffic was considerably higher than AWS. My foot was in the door!

On behalf of the community, I applied for and was awarded a DON Small and Simple grant.

We used this funding to hire a consultant. We then convened a diverse stakeholder group that represented a wide array of interests- from freight to pedestrians, business and property owners, to residents and renters – and hosted a community-wide visioning exercise that drew almost one hundred participants. With the input, the consultant helped us draft the Airport Way Visioning report.

Then report then sat. And sat. And sat some more.

In 2009 we learned that the city was planning to repave AWS. This was our chance to calm traffic in our now immerging business district. So we shared our Vision report with SDOT.

Our preparation paid off. The report caught SDOT's attention. They conducted a feasibility study along Airport Way and discovered that traffic volumes were lower than suspected. In 2011, the paving project was completed, on time and on budget. Traffic calming led to more businesses opening along AWS.

If you travel along Airport Way today, you'll see one less traffic lane, you'll see street parking and pedestrian lighting.

I provide this example not only because it involves DON, but also because the strategy I used is the same approach used in community engagement – develop a vision, generate support, implement the plan. If I can do it, anyone can.

8. *In your position, how will you support and implement the Race and Social Justice Initiative?*

To me, RSJI is about equity and access, and understanding impacts. DON's workforce is quite diverse and reflective of so many communities we serve. With regard to staff, it's not just about who they are, it's also about what they do. Who is our administrative support? Who are our managers? Who composes the leadership team? Who goes to trainings and conferences? The RSJI is an ongoing effort with the long-term goal of addressing underlying factors that create disparities. DON has done great work, such as:

- Expanding our engagement with historically underrepresented communities (HUCs). Our Public Outreach Engagement Liaison (POEL) program focuses on this mission.
- Awarding grants to community efforts that address race and social justice at the neighborhood level.
- Increasing our contracts with women and minority-owned businesses.

There is, of course, more we can do to be intentional in our efforts to advance the RSJ initiative.

For example, our Neighborhood Matching Fund is "open to diverse community groups from throughout Seattle." But are diverse community groups aware of the program? Or are these groups successful with their applications? We need to look how we are faring. If we see gaps in utilization, we need to target our efforts to increase access so a wider range of communities are participating in our programs.

When holding community meetings, I'd like to see a broader swath of people represented at the table. At DON, our workforce is diverse. I want to make sure participants in programs we support are as diverse too. We have created many of these programs with the best intentions but over time, these systems are obstacles to many. Not everyone can attend a meeting at 7pm in a community center. Some have children to tend to and families to care for; some have to be at work; some have language access barrier issues. Being aware and turning these obstacles into opportunities is how we can promote the RSJ initiative.

DON's mission states that we actively engage all communities. I want our department to be constantly striving to do just that. And I want our department to be one where everyone has access to opportunities to learn, grow, and succeed.

9. *Tell us about your experience working with underserved communities and how you've engaged with communities of color. How will you ensure that DON is engaging communities of color, refugees, and low-income people?*

First, I got my political “start” in Georgetown. Though not racially diverse as some communities, it is quite diverse in many other aspects. It’s a low income neighborhood that is home to renters, homeowners, transients, kids, seniors, artists, techies and under and unemployed. One thing that holds true across race and socio economics is that information is power. And it’s our job to get that information to people, in ways that work for them.

Access must be the highest priority with regard to our programs. We must work to develop relationships with community leaders to ensure information is shared in a variety of methods, knowing that one mode works for one group but knowing that mode doesn’t work for all groups.

We’ll be more data-driven, measuring our desired outcomes to ensure we are engaging communities of color, refugees, and low-income people. We are going to delve deeper into our programs and see who is utilizing them so we have a better understanding of who is not. For example, we’ll look at the applicants for our NMF projects and see who applied in this cycle and track the applications over several cycles. We’ll look at patterns to determine how we are allocating our staffing and resources. We’ll broaden our lens and be attentive to more than the application in one particular cycle. We’ll track:

- New applicants versus recurring applicants
- Geographical distribution (More detailed than districts)
- Conversion rate of application to successful award

By having a detailed understanding on what we do, and how are resources are being utilized, we can ensure that we engaging a multitude of populations, including communities of color, refugees, and low-income people.

10. DON is responsible for Historic Preservation, the Neighborhood Matching Fund program, the Neighborhood Districts and Coordinators, the Outreach and Engagement program, and the P-Patch Community Gardening Program. Please describe how you plan to coordinate and improve the programs in the next four years.

We have many programs housed under DON. Someone recently referred to us as the “department of stuff.” As mentioned, I am currently assessing. I want to evaluate each program’s line of business to determine how it is currently operating and identify areas where we can improve. My response to this question is going to be a series of questions that I am asking!

I do see an opportunity to functionally align our programs and services. I envision more clarity between functions which support our mission: outreach and engagement, leadership development, community investments and community assets.

11. As the City Council transitions to district representation, how will DON adapt and grow with this change?

This is a great question and one that every department is contemplating. We are thinking about how the district elections will impact us and are exploring what changes should be made, if any. No decisions have been made at this time and many more conversations are needed.

As you know, City Council convened an interdepartmental team (IDT) in early 2014. The group had a few preliminary meetings to see how other cities respond to the transition to districts. No recommendations were made at that time.

I serve as a member of an IDT that is tasked with determining immediate needs, as well as establishing best practices related to the transition to district representation.

Once the IDT completes its work, DON will explore the recommendations from the IDT and work to implement the ones that enhance DON's ability to best serve Seattle residents in their neighborhoods and districts.

12. Everyone loves the District Coordinators. What is your vision for 9 District Coordinators in 13 District Councils in 7 districts? What leadership role will you personally take?

District Coordinators are a vital part of the success of DON, and for community engagement as a whole throughout the city. We must make sure that our system, whatever system that is in place, continues to provide top-notch customer service to the residents of Seattle.

The vision for the District Coordinators is not mine alone to make. The District Coordinators have ideas. Departments have ideas. Elected officials have ideas. And the people throughout the city have ideas. My job is to solicit feedback, gather those ideas, and make sure we are providing the best service possible that is meeting the needs and wants of the city.

13. What specific and measurable outcomes should DON look to when measuring success?

DON is a unique department in that so much that we do revolves around people. We are about relationships and that is more qualitative data. That narrative is sometimes difficult to measure by numbers. That said, however, we do have data we can track such as how many new people are participating in our programs, how and where we are distributing our funding awards, and who attends meetings.

DON's success should be measured by equity in the communities we serve and the trust that we build, establish and maintain.

14. How can the DON work on land use issues and housing affordability to advise neighborhoods of upcoming projects, perhaps improve an understanding of Design Review, and reduce conflicts?

All too often, it seems, when we engage in conversations about particularly sensitive subjects, such as where and how people live, we talk at each other instead of with each other.

At the end of the day, people just want to feel heard.

I see DON as the nexus between development and growth and communities. We are liaisons, communicators, facilitators and problem-solvers. Our role is to provide the tools to create the feedback loop from the community to the departments and then back again. If we are asking communities for their thoughts and opinions then we need to share why we are making that ask and how we intend to use the information. We must then share how that information did or did not shape a project or policy.

As far as Design Review, DON can serve as a consultant to DPD's engagement process in advance of a project, help the department understand the neighborhood's point of view, and craft a strategy that addresses community concerns while also tackling critical issues such as land use, affordability and growth.

I envision DON as the community engagement resource for departments and communities. We can facilitate conversations, while educating people, and managing expectations and the process at hand.