



# Seattle Neighborhoods

## Seattle City Council Confirmation Questions and Answers

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September 12, 2018

*Seattle Department of Neighborhoods provides resources and opportunities for community members to build strong communities and improve their quality of life. Through our programs and services, we meet people where they are and help neighbors develop a stronger sense of place, build closer ties, and engage with their community and city government.*

*In July 2016, Executive Order 2016-06 reaffirmed the city's commitment to advance the effective deployment of equitable and inclusive engagement strategies across all city departments. DON was tasked to lead this citywide effort which is reflected in our mission - to strengthen Seattle by engaging all communities. We do this by fostering community partnerships, cultivating emerging leadership, and facilitating community inclusiveness.*

#### **1. What is your vision for the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) and its role in City government and in community?**

Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (DON) will be a place where community can access government and information on city programs. Our work will be driven by the community, led with equity, and cultivated through strong relationships with all communities based in our work in the Race and Social Justice Initiative and through the Racial Equity Toolkit. Our core competency will be to provide spaces for community building as defined by the communities we are engaging.

DON will be a strategic partner with city departments in the design and implementation of inclusive outreach and engagement programs. Although outreach and engagement are core to the mission and vision of all staff, we also build the skills of other city departments to engage community. We will be most successful when we, as a city, are coordinated and aligned in approach.

#### **2. What are your specific goals for DON over the next three years?**

Over the next three years DON will continue its work to connect the city with community and provide opportunities for community building. In fact, every one of DON's programs will orient around community building. By meeting people where they are, implementing culturally competent engagement strategies, and constantly evaluating our impact and intent, we can best serve our community.



DON will also be intentional within our internal organization and in solidifying relationships with Departments as we assist them with their outreach and engagement. Throughout all our programs, we will foster a spirit of collaboration so that our outreach and engagement practices are more effective.

Next year DON will begin a department-wide strategic planning process to thoughtfully integrate these goals into objectives and strategies to guide our work.

**3. What do you see as the primary challenges facing DON over the next three years?**

As a Department that is constantly in touch with community, we rely on strong, honest relationships to do our work. These relationships can often be hampered when coordination among city staff, departments, and projects is missing, and communication is sparse. In a way, innovative communication and better collaboration will also be a challenge. By engaging in processes early and as strategic partners, I believe that we can mitigate some of these challenges. This requires holistic thinking about our goals, targets, and metrics; and in some cases, requires more latitude in how we measure our impact on communities. It can be a challenge to show progress via numbers when they lack the important community context.

As a smaller department, we are continually creative in how we staff programs including commissions, which are often not funded. As we seek out better partnerships across the city, we hope that some of these challenges can be addressed.

**4. What is your general philosophy for how to most effectively work with City Council?**

It is my intent to regularly communicate and collaborate with Council. Whether it be issue-based or just regular check-ins on community or neighborhood issues, I am happy to meet at your convenience. For those who I haven't yet met, I plan to talk with each councilmember and their staff to understand the top neighborhood priorities and how DON can be helpful.

**a. How will you be responsive to Council requests, in particular regarding priorities that may differ from those of the Executive Branch?**

It is my intent to be responsive to council requests. With regular communication with council offices, it is my hope to understand and address each councilmember's priorities. In the rare cases where Council and the Executive differ on a DON issue, I will do my best to provide the information that I can.

**5. Using our 24/7 homeless shelter as an example, how will you coordinate with other departments, such as Parks, SDOT or Office of Housing, to communicate with neighbors?**

DON has been actively working across multiple departments on coordination and implementation of our 24/7 homeless shelter and tiny home programs. As a part of the Mayor's Pathway to 500 Initiative, DON is working with HSD to develop and implement outreach plans in communities where new managed



villages and shelter programs are being sited. We found that when we are all aligned on our approach, DON can provide more accurate information to community and address any questions and concerns earlier. In most cases, DON develops an outreach timeline template that is tailored to each community which includes tactics such as conducting early outreach; e-mailing invitations, updates, and flyers; canvassing with Community Engagement Coordinators (CECs) and Community Liaisons; convening community meetings; attending existing community organization meetings; conducting small meetings with business owners; and producing pop-up activities. In some cases, this approach has resulted in changes to the actual operation and plans for sites. As we continue this work, DON is committed to evaluating our approach to thoughtfully engage our community.

**6. DON is now charged with guiding early community outreach for the Design Review program. How will DON support community members and their voices in this process?**

The purpose of the program is to establish a dialogue between applicants and interested communities early in the development process. This allows the applicants to share information about the project; and by seeking input, better understand the local context as well as hear community interests and concerns related to their project. Launched this summer, DON is in the early phase of the early outreach program. Even so, the program has been met with positive feedback from the community.

In coordination with SDCI, DON staff is gearing up to more closely engage with community members about the program and how they can utilize it through a series of neighborhood events this fall. The Early Community Outreach [webpage](#) on DON's website has several resources to help applicants do their best to conduct outreach to community members, along with new tools for community members to use. For example, the webpage's project blog lists all the projects that are subject to the early outreach for design review requirements; and its calendar lists all the in-person community meetings that are happening across the city.

These tools and resources provide much more transparency and accountability. Contact information and project details are now readily available on the website, so residents can contact developers after the early outreach requirements are complete and track the progress of projects as they are moving through the process.

**7. The transformation of Your Voice, Your Choice out of the Neighborhood Parks and Street Fund grant-making process has increased participation in the grant-making process.**

**a. What have you learned from the changes that have been made?**

For the 2018 cycle, DON restructured and redesigned the program to center equity, specifically communities of color, in all programmatic decisions including funding allocations, the creation of a Steering Committee, strategic partnerships, and outreach. We have learned that to engage with diverse communities and neighborhoods we cannot have a one-size fit all approach to this program.



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One of the most significant changes was how funding was allocated across districts. In 2017, Your Voice, Your Choice (YVYC) divided the \$2 million dollars equally across the Council Districts, each receiving \$285,000 for the park and street improvements of their choice. We clearly heard that it was not equitable and by doing so, we did not recognize that all neighborhoods had not received the same level of investment and attention from government. For 2018, City Council added a one-time \$1 million appropriation to YVYC. We created a compensated Steering Committee that decided to designate this additional \$1 million in funding for projects in Equity and Environment initiative (EEI) Focus Areas: geographic areas where communities of color, immigrants, refugees, people with low incomes, Native peoples and limited-English proficiency individuals tend to live. These areas are highly impacted by socio-economic and environmental challenges. Projects continued to be voted on through district-based ballots, and the top vote-getting projects in EEI Focus Areas citywide were funded up to \$1 million overall. The original \$2 million in funding continued to be divided equally among all City Council Districts, with each district receiving approximately \$285,000 in funding. Because of this change, YVYC funded 51 projects of which 20 are in EEI Focus Areas.

We also expanded our partnerships which significantly impacted in-language engagement. This year we conducted in-person Idea Collection in Spanish, Khmer, and Arabic, recognizing that just translating materials would not suffice. We developed relationships with service providers early in the process to engage folks who would not traditionally participate. We received nearly 400 ballots in Chinese from the Chinatown International District alone because of hard working volunteers that utilized this program as a means for their community to receive much needed investments.

### **b. How will those lessons be applied to other grant-making programs?**

DON received inquiries locally and nationally from organizations interested in using participatory budgeting within their decision-making. We are also working with other city departments such as SDOT to share best practices and perhaps some lessons in program design. Most importantly, we have learned that our program must be responsive to community feedback, particularly the voices of communities of color. We must be accountable to this feedback and make changes that demonstrate that we are not only listening but that we are directing resources in new ways.

### **c. What else will the Department do to build on those successes?**

We know that we must continue to improve this program by continuing to show up and preserve partnerships. We heard from many that city funding programs are time consuming and feel transactional. We will remove barriers to participation and bring new voices to the table by stepping outside of the “traditional” avenues for engagement.

## **8. What is your vision for the P-Patch program? What are the challenges you currently see in the program, and how do you plan to address those challenges?**

I envision P-Patch as equity-centered urban agriculture as well as a community-building program. The P-Patch program should continue to expand the variety of community gardening models it supports (e.g., individual plots, collective gardens, market gardening, giving gardens, raised beds, food forests) to



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better ensure all program participants feel welcome and supported in their efforts. Staff will also work to increase participation (including leadership roles) by low-income individuals and communities of color.

Some current program challenges include long wait lists, reduced administrative staffing resources within DON, and inconsistent resource availability across gardens (i.e. some P-Patches have significant capacity to raise money and organize volunteers for garden activities while others do not). To address these challenges, DON has aligned program resources within an equity framework to better serve 1) communities with reduced access to healthy and affordable produce, and 2) areas with low access to opportunity and/or a high risk of displacement. I believe that we should enhance partnerships with other local urban agriculture and food security programs to better leverage city resources and existing investments and respond to community needs.

### **9. Using the “Showbox” site as an example,**

- a) What is your vision for the historic preservation program?**
- b) How will you balance the needs of the City to grow and support new opportunities for housing while also supporting the City’s cultural and historic resources?**
- c) How can the historic preservation program better serve underrepresented communities, particularly ethnic communities with a deep history in Seattle? How will you work with tribal communities to respect and honor their traditions and role in the City?**

The Historic Preservation program should be a tool to preserve buildings that are important to the historic fabric of Seattle. It should not be a tool against growth, but one that can enhance neighborhoods and communities. Done correctly, historic preservation can also tell our cultural history and preserve spaces that exemplify that history.

Under my leadership, the Historic Preservation program will be better integrated into the other departmental programs so that we can more easily look for opportunities to be proactive, not reactive to historic preservation. I believe that it is important to update survey and inventory data to ensure that we can anticipate potential conflicts between housing and historic preservation. This work should be done with a priority of using an RSJ and a cultural lens. It is essential that these processes not be exclusive but instead open to comment and conversation among our native, immigrant, and communities of color. Currently, DON has been coordinating with 4Culture’s Beyond Integrity team to find ways to ensure that the documentation of our city’s historic landmarks tell an inclusive story.

### **10. What is your organizational management approach? How will you review internal operations and promote employee training and growth opportunities? What is your leadership approach?**

As a department director, I operate with a transparent and accountable management model and believe that the direction, approach, and attitude held in the department begins with me. DON is a department with a high standard of work; to meet this, I have installed a collaborative, team-oriented structure.



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DON is at its best when we are working together across programs. Over the last months I have spent time reviewing current organizational structures and approaches and have worked with staff and stakeholders on ideas of how to perhaps transition to more sustainable models. I have strongly encouraged open conversation and collaboration and have moved to monthly all-staff meetings where we host RSJ conversations and do shared learning on different work programs.

Career development and training are extremely important. I believe that it is my duty as a director to proactively seek these out and work with staff on skills training. I have currently given out-of-class opportunities for supervisory positions to staff in two programs. I have also encouraged staff to take classes in Cornerstone, Career Quest, and other leadership programs.

### **11. Give an example of your strategic planning and explain the result. What did you learn?**

In my experience, the most successful strategic planning is inclusive of diverse opinions, able to orient work toward common goals with shared ownership, and not punitive. Throughout my career, I have participated and led many strategic planning efforts both at the city as well as in private practice. During my time at the Office of Economic Development, we undertook a strategic planning process through many of the Only in Seattle grantees and even on the program itself. We approached planning with creativity and an open mind. Through one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and smaller community meetings, we also worked with outside stakeholders to make sure that community voices were represented.

At my direction, DON will begin strategic planning in 2019. Presently, we are collecting team workplans to create a common template to support our strategic planning work. To support this effort as well as other internal strategic functions, I have reoriented the organizational structure to create an impact strategic advisor.

### **12. Race and social justice is central to the City's mission. In your position, how will you support and implement the Race and Social Justice Initiative?**

The Race and Social Justice Initiative is core to our work and mission. It will not exist in its own workplan but instead be integrated in our day-to-day interactions, programs, grants, and policies. As a former Change team co-chair, I am aware of how at times staff do not feel supported in the work and how the work is often not translated into policy. It is my expectation that RSJ conversations not exist in its separate space, but instead as a regular part of work; staff are not expected to take time off or flex time to participate in RSJ work. We have instituted RSJ conversations as part of each all staff meeting and are currently relaunching conversations about how DON staff want to construct the next iteration of the Change Team. In partnership with SOCR, DON is also working on several RETs and attempting to better align the results with policy decisions and programmatic changes.



**13. DON is responsible for a diverse collection of programs. Please describe how you plan to coordinate and improve these programs in the next three years.**

As DON continues its work and grow its relationship as strategic partners with other departments, it is essential that we view DON programs not as individual efforts but instead as a continuum of community services and interactions. To better coordinate these efforts, we are working with departments to sign blanket MOAs so that DON can be more flexible with the staff we use and relationships we bring to bear. In this model everyone is either directly or indirectly supporting outreach and engagement.

I have also organized the former outreach and engagement team into two programs that are working together but have slightly different responsibilities. The External Relations team, which includes the Community Engagement Coordinators, is working with the community on day-to-day concerns, impacts, and city programs. The Strategic Initiatives team supports longer-term and more system-wide outreach needs such as our approach to homelessness, the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda, and transportation projects.

**14. Under the previous administration, DON moved away from strictly neighborhood-based outreach toward community engagement for all community members, especially those not at the table. What is your vision for DON's role in community engagement? How do you plan to support longstanding relationships with Seattle's traditional neighborhood organizations?**

The Community Engagement Coordinators (CECs) are a crucial element to DON's approach to engaging community stakeholders. Annually, the four CECs attend over 800 meetings and community events, do more than 300 formal presentations to community that reach 15,000 constituents, and connect over 1,300 constituents to city programs and services. Each community is viewed through a lens of equity and inclusion regardless if their need is short-term or long-term. Using their extensive experience and knowledge of the community, CECs work to fairly balance their engagement with traditional and emerging neighborhood groups. They work with other city staff and DON staff to coordinate attendance at events, responds to constituents, and do community outreach for city departments.

DON provides community stakeholder lists that include both longstanding as well as emerging neighborhood organizations. This information is used by city departments, as well as external users such as developers who are participating in the Early Community Outreach for Design Review program. For those community groups that are new and not familiar with city government (as the organizations that have been in existence for dozens of years), we launched the Community Resource Hub portal to help residents learn more about government and its resources, as well as provide tools to help groups get engaged and get organized. Our PACE program also teaches civic leadership skills.

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

DON is constantly evaluating our engagement approaches, methods, and ways we are measuring success. What works in one community or neighborhood may not in another. Some of our current measures involve the number of people who have participated in our programs, including voters in Your





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Voice Your Choice (VYVC), new applicants to the Neighborhood Matching Fund (NMF), and the number of underserved and new communities who have attended our Community Conversations through the Community Liaisons program. DON also measures the volunteer hours committed by community members through the Community Involvement Commission, Seattle Renters' Commission, Seattle Youth Commission, Landmarks Preservation Board, the six Historic District Boards, Major Institutions and Schools Committees, Your Voice, Your Choice Steering Committee, P-Patch Community Gardening program, and the number of hours people engage with each other through the support of our programs (Neighborhood Matching Fund, Duwamish River Opportunity Fund, Find It, Fix It Community Grants).

### **16. What is DON doing to support moving Seattle's homeless population into permanent housing? How can that effort be improved?**

As a part of the Mayor's Pathway to 500 Initiative, DON is working with HSD to develop and implement outreach plans in communities where new managed villages and shelter programs are being sited. We believe that successfully engaging community leads to better outcomes. DON developed an outreach timeline template that is tailored to each community and has included tactics like conducting early outreach; e-mailing invitations, updates and flyers; canvassing with Community Engagement Coordinators (CECs); convening community meetings; attending existing community organization meetings; organizing small meetings with business owners; and producing pop-up activities. We also work closely with HSD and LIHI in supporting the Community Advisory Committees (CACs) that are created for each of the city's managed villages.

It is important to manage expectations, have clarity and clear communication on recurring concerns, promote transparency, and provide data on outcomes to help build trust and credibility. DON continues to work with HSD in the development of CAC webpages including the posting of monthly meeting notes, codes of conduct, and contact information as part of our commitment to full transparency to the community regarding the nine managed villages (sanctioned encampments).

### **17. Why do you want to be the Department of Neighborhoods Director?**

DON is the place where community voices can be elevated. I am excited to be part of a fantastic team of dedicated staff that can help think strategically on how to bring government to where community is. Because of its work and role in city government, DON is uniquely situated to cover a broad set of issues and can work collaboratively with Departments to make government more accessible. As Director, I am excited to play a role in guiding these efforts.