

## Seattle City Council Confirmation Questions

### Emily Alvarado – Director, Office of Housing

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

Seattle’s need for affordable housing is greater than ever and the shortage of affordable housing is already critical. We will need more resources, innovation, and strategic partnerships if we are to overcome the significant deficit of affordable housing, make immediate and meaningful impact in building an affordable and equitable City, and provide stability to Seattle residents. I will support a strengthened mission for the Office of Housing through the following priorities:

- *Advance Racial Equity:* Focus investments and policies to address the disproportionate housing needs of communities of color. Actively work to affirmatively further fair housing, improve opportunity for all communities, and end housing and segregation and housing discrimination.
- *Invest in Affordable Housing for Low Income Households:* Invest in the production and preservation of high-quality, affordable housing located throughout the city for households with the greatest need and least served by the market—low-income individuals and families, seniors and people with disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness.
- *Promote Middle Income Housing:* Collaborate across departments and sectors to support ways for middle income workers to access affordable homes in Seattle. Support middle class growth through investments in rental and ownership housing for low wage working households.
- *Address Displacement and Foster Equitable Development:* Disrupt displacement through strategic acquisition and investment, community preference and other policies, and support for housing co-location with community-stabilizing spaces.

**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 believe in fostering a collaborative and productive relationship with Council to achieve effective housing solutions for the people of Seattle. My approach will be rooted in open dialogue, responsiveness, and joint problem solving. While working for and reporting to the Mayor, I intend to work closely with the Chair of the Housing Committee and stay informed of Council issues. I will continue to foster collaborative relationships with Councilmembers and legislative staff so that even when disagreements arise, communications are underpinned by trust and respect.

**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?**

It is in the mutual interest of the Executive, the Council, and the people of Seattle for City Council to make sound policy and budgetary decisions. I am committed to providing City Council with accurate, clear, and responsive information in a timely fashion. I will work to ensure the department's responses are informed by the objective and purpose of Council's request.

**4. How do you balance the need to invest in housing for the lowest income workers (0-30% AMI) and the desire to show movement 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?**

Seattle should be a city where people of all incomes can find a stable, affordable home. For decades, low income households have experienced homelessness, housing instability, and severe cost-burden in Seattle. With the city's precipitous growth in the past few years, and the growing gap between rents and incomes, those housing insecurities have exacerbated, and middle-income households increasingly struggle with a lack of affordable housing options. I believe we must both scale up investments in housing for people with the lowest incomes and greatest needs and implement meaningful strategies to create middle income housing.

Under my leadership, the Office of Housing will support housing for a broad range of incomes and populations, although interventions and tools may vary. While public subsidy is necessary to support rental housing for extremely low-income households, a combination of land use and regulatory changes and public-private partnerships may be effective at creating more middle-income rental options. I look forward to collaborating with the Mayor's Affordable Middle-Income Housing Advisory Council and advancing promising strategies. The Office of Housing can also increase production of permanently affordable homeownership for low- and middle-income housing, with a focus on serving communities of color, who have been disproportionately excluded from homeownership and the stability and equity that comes with it.

In addition, as Director I will continue active participation in the High Cost Cities Housing Forum, to share and learn best practices with other urban housing leaders and discuss how to balance and address our housing needs.

**5. What are your priorities and thoughts about including higher labor standards on affordable housing development efforts around the city, where have you seen higher labor standards be included and be successful?**

Affordable housing developments can and should provide a range of public benefits, including labor equity outcomes. The workers who build affordable housing and those who provide critical social services inside to residents, should be paid livable wages. Presently, policies require that prevailing wage be paid on City-funded affordable housing development, WMBE goals are in place, and a pilot affordable housing development is underway with a Community Workforce Agreement.

The Office of Housing should review and report on data of labor outcomes across affordable housing programs, and work in collaboration with developers, workers, and unions to determine opportunities to ensure ongoing labor equity outcomes balanced with an understanding of and transparency around cost-drivers and cost constraints.

**6. What suggestions do you have to fully fund the NOFA list every year, and what are your thoughts about taking the opportunity to issue multiple NOFA awards a year?**

For several years, requests for funding in affordable housing projects have exceeded available resources. Projects seeking OH investment are unique and diverse, serve a range of populations, are located across the city, and are sponsored by numerous non-profit organizations and for-profit developers. Selecting from among the high-quality projects has become increasingly difficult. More resources are needed to fund shovel ready affordable housing, meet the City's multiple policy priorities, and provide more affordable homes as soon as possible.

Mayor Durkan has a commitment to bring additional resources for investments in affordable housing. However, the City cannot do it alone. We must work in partnership with our Office of Intergovernmental Relations to collaborate with King County and our State to bring additional resources to Seattle. We must reverse the trend of federal disinvestment from low-income housing and reinvigorate a federal commitment to provide affordable housing capital, operating and services funding, particularly for extremely low-income households.

Issuing more than one NOFA could be helpful. For example, a rolling NOFA is useful for acquisition and preservation resources needed to move land and buildings off the speculative market. However, an annual—or semi-annual—process is helpful to align resources with other public funders and maximize our competitiveness for leverage.

**7. Given the limited (and dwindling) resources available for the current NOFA, what are your budget priorities?**

As Director, I will continue to steward the Office of Housing's resources with priorities based on adopted policy and applicable law, informed by data and best practices. For the past two years, the Office of Housing has made record level investments in the annual housing NOFA. Investment priorities for housing are guided by the fund sources and set out in the Council-adopted Seattle Housing Levy Administrative and Financial Plan and Housing Funding Policies and in the annual NOFA.

Established priorities include:

- Population priorities: Housing for homeless families and individuals, including chronically homeless individuals with disabling conditions; housing for seniors and people with disabilities; and housing affordable to low wage working families and individuals (at or below 60%AMI);
- Location priorities: access to transit; access to opportunity; advance equitable development goals and address displacement; and
- Cost effectiveness and sustainability.

These adopted policies are also consistent with our federal obligation to affirmatively further fair housing, our regional commitment to solve homelessness, Consolidated Plan, countywide growth and planning efforts, and coordinated efforts among statewide public funders.

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

Housing is a basic human need, housing cost is a driver of homelessness, and housing is a solution to homelessness. I support creating a unified and aligned regional response to homelessness. The Office of Housing will coordinate with a range of City, County, Regional and Federal partners to address our homelessness crisis. Office of Housing efforts will be aligned with the new Regional Homelessness Authority's plan for shelter, housing, and other services.

For decades, the Office of Housing has been a key funder of permanent supportive housing in Seattle, which is a proven, cost-effective, and humane solution to provides homes for chronically homeless people. Permanent supportive housing requires a partnership to align capital, operating and maintenance, and services funding. As we continue to invest in permanent supportive housing, we must continue and expand our partnership with the Seattle Housing Authority for applications for additional vouchers and with regional partners and the new Regional Homelessness Authority for services funding. In addition, the Office of Housing remains committed to the successful implementation of Housing Connector—connecting property owners and managers to those most in need of housing.

**9. What are your ideas for working collaborative and strategically with other City Departments, such as OPCD, to align capital and programmatic investments to achieve greater equity in Seattle communities?**

Housing is an intersectional issue related to poverty, land use, health, education, employment, and community development, among others. Building off trusted relationships with existing leadership at the City, I am committed to working across departments—SDCI, OPCD, HSD, OIR, OED, ARTS, and DON—to advance shared priorities and achieve more equitable outcomes for Seattle communities.

I will support the Equitable Development Initiative's effort to provide capacity building support for organizations led by and accountable to communities of color who are building a mission to provide affordable housing as part of an anti-displacement vision. I will also partner to identify untapped opportunities for joint capital investment in affordable housing developments, particularly with EDI and ARTS for ground floor community and cultural spaces and DEEL for early childhood education facilities, including childcare. In addition, I will leverage community planning processes and equity plans facilitated by partner departments, as a source to identify community priorities for affordable housing projects.

**10. In your position, how will you promote racial and social equity and utilize the City's Racial Equity Toolkit? Can you provide some specific examples?**

I have an unwavering commitment to racial equity. America's history of housing policy has been explicitly racially discriminatory. As Director, I will work to undo past harms from housing policy by rooting the Office of Housing's work in a mission to advance racial equity. Specifically, OH's work will be driven by data on racial demographics and equitable outcomes and by the input of impacted communities.

During my career at the City I have advanced key strategies to promote racial equity, beginning with implementation of the City's Racial Equity Toolkit, including stewarding the community-initiated work on Community Preference and Affirmative Marketing.

As Director, I will support and empower the Office of Housing's dedicated Change Team to continue to provide accountability and leadership in creating an anti-racist department, listening to the Change Team's suggestions about hiring, contracting, policies and investment. I will ground OH's work in an analysis of and commitment to affirmatively furthering Fair Housing—centering affordable housing delivery in goals to end segregation and discrimination and foster inclusion.

**11. Under your leadership how will OH work with and support projects responsive to communities of color and low-income families led by organizations who are still developing their expertise in affordable housing development and construction?**

Communities most impacted by homelessness, housing insecurity and displacement should have the opportunity to lead and own affordable housing development projects. An increasing number of community-based organizations led by and responsive to communities of color, have sought and received funding from the Office of Housing over the past few years. I will be a partner with these organizations and am committed to providing robust assistance to support their vision.

But one-time capital funding for a specific housing development is not enough. Affordable housing must last for fifty years, so an organization's sustainability is imperative. We need a Citywide commitment to support the health of organizations so that they have the sustained resources and staffing to steward long term capital investments. In addition, OH is a minority funder in affordable housing, meaning banks and investors must be brought along to support investment in the developments and organizations as well. This means, at a minimum, supporting EDI efforts to provide capacity building support to organizations and supporting partnerships when they are welcome.

**12. How will OH work with affordable housing developers to encourage more projects that co-locate housing and facilities needed by community, i.e. affordable childcare, affordable commercial space, or preschool on site?**

Co-locating housing and community facilities is a smart way to leverage City-supported developments to meet multiple community needs and maximize developments in a growing city. It is also good for affordable housing residents who can benefit from community centers, day care, and health facilities onsite.

The Office of Housing has a track record in co-locating housing and community-serving facilities. As Director, I will continue to work with other capital departments to identify more project specific funding opportunities and also to explore policy-based ways to align strategies among public agencies and non-profits to enable future partnerships. In particular, I am hopeful about opportunities to continue to site early childhood education facilities on the ground floor of family focused affordable rental housing and believe that the Home and Hope initiative can be a good partner.

**13. How will you encourage more family-sized units in affordable housing projects?**

Ensuring a supply of affordable family-sized apartments is a racial justice issue and is necessary to further fair housing choice. The majority of apartments built in Seattle are one-bedrooms or studios and larger homes are out of reach for many families. Investments in family-sized housing, particularly for the lowest income households, must be part of the Office of Housing's focus.

The Seattle Housing Levy Administrative and Financial Plan and Housing Funding Policies sets a priority for family-sized units. The focus on family sized units must be balanced with other population priorities, including seniors, homeless individuals, and individuals with disabilities.

**14. How will you balance the funding needs of maintaining existing affordable housing units while adding new units?**

Preservation and stewardship of our roughly 16,000 existing City-supported affordable rental units must be a priority for the Office of Housing. The existing residents in affordable housing rely on the Office of Housing to ensure that they live in healthy, safe homes. We must actively invest in rehabilitation to extend the useful life of buildings in the OH portfolio. We must also support the health of organizations with affordable units in their portfolio, so they are financially sound and able to maintain City-funded housing.

In addition, as Director I will actively monitor buildings in Seattle with expiring subsidies, many of which were not funded by the City, and prioritize opportunities for preservation of existing affordable housing, when feasible. For incentive programs with shorter term affordability requirements, like MFTE, we must identify strategies to protect tenants, to people are not harmed or displaced when affordability restrictions lapse.

**15. 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?**

As Director, I will continue stewardship of our investments in low-income housing with an interest in innovation and creativity, particularly considering the growing pipeline of applications, a need to produce housing quickly, a focus on cost and timing, increasing attention to ownership by historically-rooted organizations and communities of color, a desire for investment in high cost locations, and the emerging needs of other public funders.

First, Seattle is well positioned to design and engage in strategic acquisition and investment, which can be a creative and bold part of a broader equitable TOD and anti-displacement agenda. I am optimistic and excited about the potential to drive desired public benefits—co-location with childcare, arts and cultural space, and health facilities, family-sized housing, and mixed-income housing—on City-initiated RFPs in partnership with community and other departments.

Second, we should continue to consider how to innovative construction technologies—modular, optimization, etc.—can produce construction and operational cost savings in affordable housing. We could explore standardized plan sets for PSH to save money and time. We should also

explore whether new construction technologies and designs can support broader City efforts around sustainability and climate resiliency.

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

The Office of Housing should look to the following outcomes:

- Production and policy goals established by the Seattle Housing Levy, Mandatory Housing Affordability, Multi-family and Single -family Weatherization, and other Council-adopted housing funds and programs;
- Commitments articulated in the City's Assessment of Fair Housing; and
- Measures committed to under the RSJI workplan.

**17. 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.)?**

As Director, I will be committed to continuing the Office of Housing's track record of meeting or exceeding the goals set forth to the voters in the Seattle Housing Levy. The 2016 Seattle Housing Levy provides \$290 million over seven years for housing production, preservation, and assistance, and includes goals to produce 2,150 units in the rental production and preservation program, 510 units supported with Operating and Maintenance, 280 households served in the homeownership programs, and a combined goal to spend 60% of rental production and O&M resources on housing At or below 30% AMI, among others.

The two-year summary of funding and production for the Levy Annual Report annual report demonstrates that each Levy program is presently on track to meet its goals (1,031 units in rental production and preservation, up to 308 units with O&M, and 105 households in homeownership). I will continue track and provide transparency into these critical outcomes.