

Councilmember Richard Conlin

1. **Socially responsible development:** Seattle takes a strong stance in favor of environmentally sustainable development. Do you believe that Seattle also encourages socially responsible development? What does socially responsible development mean to you, and in the absence of any policy incentives, how does it come about? How can the City Council encourage it with policy?

Yes, I believe that Seattle encourages socially responsible development, and we do have policy incentives for it, although there are more incentives that we can add. Our Comprehensive Plan – Towards a Sustainable Seattle -- is built around four core values that Seattle residents identified through a community engagement process – environmental stewardship, economic opportunity, community, and social justice. We cannot achieve our goals unless we successfully integrate achieving all of those values. Socially responsible development responds to the needs of all of our communities, is informed by our Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI), and ensures that all of us share the benefits of prosperity – and are engaged in making decisions about our future.

To achieve those goals requires us to create innovative land use and community development policies that are respectful of our existing communities and lay the groundwork for future generations. Socially responsible development integrates all forms of housing opportunities into our neighborhoods, supports an educational system that eliminates disparities, provides a social safety net that protects the lost, the least, and the left behind, and provides services and institutions that serve every community with respect for unique cultural and social attributes.

The most salient issue facing us today is how to ensure that affordable housing and transportation choices are integrated and accessible to all. My task as the Council's land use chair and representative on the Sound Transit Board is to bring these two things together. We have just achieved a signal success with the Capitol Hill Development Agreement, which allows additional height and density around the station in return for 36% of new housing units being affordable and the community receiving a series of benefits such as a plaza that can host the Farmers Market and the opportunity for a new community center. And the buildings will be required to meet high environmental standards, while proposers will get extra credit for providing more affordable housing and/or greener buildings. This is how we work together as a community to make social justice and environmental sustainability happen.

The Superfund cleanup of the Duwamish River offers another opportunity to integrate environmental stewardship and social responsibility. I have worked with the community and the decision makers to ensure that the cleanup generates jobs for community members, and that the outcomes will support sustaining the working class communities of Georgetown and South Park and maintain our manufacturing base while opening up the river as a great amenity for our city and the surrounding neighborhoods. This kind of integrated strategy is another example of how we can – and must – achieve both social and environmental goals together.

Finally, we should continue to support and expand local business ownership, cooperatives, and buy-local initiatives like our 'Only in Seattle' program. In order to do this, we should expand our business services and assistance to small and medium size businesses and promote and partner with residents to impart and encourage entrepreneurial skills.

2. **Negative outcomes:** What trends accompanying growth and development in other cities, or in Seattle's history, do you hope Seattle will avoid in future development cycles? What brought you to live in Seattle? What aspects of growth do you believe bring about fear of loss? How can Seattle avoid negative outcomes?

Seattle can avoid negative outcomes from change by fostering an economy that encourages creativity and works for all and by partnering with our communities to implement our neighborhood plans. Historically, Seattle has experienced a boom-and-bust development cycle. So much of our economy was dependent on natural resource extraction or a single industry (gold in Alaska, fish, timber, and more recently aircraft). It also reflects our isolation from much of the rest of the country – the upper left hand corner of the map. We were a medium size city well out of the mainstream. Our development was fueled by speculation and was often on shaky ground.

In the 1970's, after the Boeing bust, we began evolving a more resilient model, taking advantage of our proximity to Asia, our great natural environment, and our ability to innovate. But the tech bust ten years ago should remind us that we cannot allow ourselves to become complacent – we must encourage and support an education system and an economy that will foster lifelong learning, develop skills, and generate opportunities. In the 1950's, the City of Detroit had the highest household income of any city in the world, and we should not take our prosperity for granted.

I was attracted to Seattle by its fabulous natural setting and by the sense that here was a City that was working to address core issues of sustainability and to build a multi-cultural society (my family is multi-ethnic, and we were looking for a place where that was welcomed). We fell in love with the neighborhoods we lived in – first Phinney Ridge, then Madrona. I think our experience is similar to that of many people in our City. Most of us – or our ancestors -- came here looking for something new and different.

I do not believe that people fear change – they fear loss. Community leaders must work with people to understand those concerns and to find ways to embrace changes while ensuring that all will benefit and that the gains outweigh the losses. That is why the core philosophy of our development strategy must continue to be built around engaging people – as we did so successfully in the neighborhood planning process – acknowledging that change will come, and working to find ways to make that change a positive experience. The premise of the neighborhood planning process was that each community was asked if they could sustain the level of projected growth – and then what it would take to make that a positive experience. Surprisingly, every neighborhood affirmed that they could take on the new development, and gave the City a list of improvements that needed to accompany it. For the last decade, I have worked to implement as many of those improvements as possible.

We cannot be successful as a democratic society unless communities can embrace the change that will have to happen as the City grows and transforms. We can only do that if we ensure that development is accompanied by the essential components of livability that will strengthen our neighborhoods – parks, transit, libraries, affordable housing, great schools, a workable transportation system... That requires communication, and dedicating ourselves to ensuring that there is genuine and deep engagement of the diversity of our people. I continue to support the neighborhood planning and neighborhood engagement model that was developed in the 1990's, but which lost some of its salience and visibility in the ensuing decade. Over the last several years, there has been some excellent work in expanding opportunities to low income and immigrant communities and implementing the Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI), and the Neighborhood Matching Fund has continued to do great work, but we are still not where we should be. That is why I sponsored legislation setting a goal and plan for neighborhood plan updates, initiated the work to dramatically increase our community garden (p-patch) program, and supported the RSJI work. I will continue to work towards a participatory society in which all of our people have a voice.

3. **Process:** How do you rate Seattle's speed in response to demand for housing? How can Seattle improve upon existing planning policy and process (Comprehensive Plan; Design Review; Planning Commission; etc.)? What are the benefits and shortcomings of the "Seattle process"? If you would modify the planning or permitting process in any way, please cite positive and/or negative examples from other cities, or proposals envisioned by current and past council members. Are there any specific precedents from Seattle or other cities that you view as a model of civic and private partnership in the built environment?

Seattle can improve on our ability to make housing happen by doing process right and by taking actions to ensure that our legislative and permitting procedures are efficient and goal oriented. The benefits of the Seattle process are its ability to include all voices – it is a very democratic concept. Doing process right means defining an end point, when the decision will be made, being clear about who makes the decision, and setting parameters that let participants know what options can be on the table. The process fails when it becomes an endless loop, with no clear end point, and in the worst case the only ones whose views are taken into account are the last ones standing while the rest have left out of exhaustion.

Our planning and permitting processes do have some relatively clear parameters, but it is still a long process. Much of the length is specified by state law, and cannot be changed very readily. While retaining the fairness and openness that the process is intended to provide, we can make some changes that will offer more flexibility and will reduce delay. We should not be afraid to eliminate regulations that do not serve a useful public purpose and hamper housing development.

In planning, our core strategy should be to focus on providing the opportunities for the things that we would like to see happen, instead of trying to prevent things that we don't want to happen, as the current land use code too often is focused on. The problem with the preventive approach is that it discourages innovation and is often ineffective, since astute legal minds can often find a way around

even the tightest restrictions. A more modern code would provide broad parameters and criteria for development, and encourage developers to be creative if they can demonstrate results. The 'Seattle Green Factor' is a great example of this kind of approach – developers are required to meet a standard for the amount of trees, shrubs, etc., but they can select from a menu the ways in which they can meet the standard.

We have now had enough experience with Design Review to know that it needs a comprehensive review. While there have been significant improvements to many projects, it seems likely that there are faster and more efficient ways to get there, and I think it is time to do the hard work to evaluate what is working and what can be improved.

Our permitting process has been improving, but is still too cumbersome. I would like to see us continue to do process improvements, and experiment with some innovative ideas. One model that I would like to see us try is the accelerated permitting process used in San Jose, where a developer can pay a premium to have all of the decision makers engage in a two day dynamic workshop, where permits can be created as a whole instead of passing from desk to desk.

4. **Built Form:** What do you believe is the right mix of parking and building typologies in Seattle in the next 10 years? If you anticipate reduced car ownership and/or increased density, please discuss potential changes in how Seattleites access nature and the outdoors. Examples of building typologies include:
- Single Family
 - Small lot/ADUs
 - Rowhouse or cottage housing
 - Townhomes
 - Midrise developments (45' to 85')
 - High rise developments

Seattle must develop more housing in order to meet our growth management goals, to bring people back into the City who cannot afford to live here, and to reduce the strain on our environment and transportation system (and attendant carbon emissions) that are the result of long commutes. All of these types of housing can contribute to that, and we must include them all in our strategic approach.

There are very few opportunities for new traditional detached single family housing, but there are places where cottage zoning can be implemented to provide small detached units, and there are some opportunities for infill. Doing the right kind of infill – with houses that are relatively modest – will make them more affordable and more compatible with existing neighborhoods. We will soon adopt comprehensive small lot legislation that will provide a better basis for future infill. I would like to see us expand the opportunities for ADU's, which are being built more slowly than we had anticipated, and include rowhouses, townhomes, and multiplexes. All of these are important housing types, but will not provide all of the density we need to reach our goals.

The best way to provide that density is to continue to develop higher buildings in our extended downtown and Urban Centers, and to concentrate on midrise developments in our Urban Villages. The Capitol Hill Development Agreement that I helped negotiate and led through both the Council and the Sound Transit Board is a great example of what we can achieve – 75 to 85 foot zoning with 36% of the units affordable. The redevelopment of High Point, Rainier Vista, New Holly, and soon Yesler Terrace has greatly increased the number of units and provided more options for residents, and Yesler Terrace will provide a significant addition to our near-downtown housing by adding some higher buildings to the mix.

We are currently implementing reduced parking requirements in denser areas, and are likely to extend that to transit corridors. Our goal is to allow the market to determine how much parking is built. It is of necessity not a very precise tool, but as we continue to increase opportunities for travel by means other than the private automobile, we are hopeful that this will balance out successfully. In the Capitol Hill Development Agreement, we for the first time adopted a parking maximum (70% of the number of units), which we think makes sense in this community that is well served by transit. I am intrigued by some of the ideas that Alan Durning has brought forward recently about how expensive parking is and the counter-productivity of some of our requirements, for example that when we require a parking space with a single family dwelling the curb cut for the driveway takes a parking space away from the street, therefore meaning no net gain of parking as a result of this requirement. Recognizing that the automobile will continue to have a role in transportation, but that more and more flexibility away from ownership can be provided by taxi-like vehicles and car-sharing programs, we should continue to explore alternatives to our current parking requirements.

5. **Affordability:** How do you define affordability, and in which neighborhoods and what mix should affordability be found? Please also discuss strategies you believe are effective at reaching affordability targets in these areas, and those you believe are ineffective. Please cite specific examples from other cities. Example strategies include:
- Preservation of older housing and retail, and other means to prevent displacement;
 - Increased housing supply and microhousing;
 - Incentive zoning;
 - Seattle Housing Levy—please also discuss any specific changes to the program or amount that you'd favor when the Housing Levy is brought up for renewal in 2016; and
 - Multi-Family Tax Exemption.

It is important to include both key levels of affordability in an affordable housing strategy. First, we must emphasize the critical need for low income housing for those who are priced out of the market, 30-50% of median income and below. People in this classification have few options, and as the federal government reduces its commitment, it is important that the City, SHA, and non-profit providers have options and opportunities to develop new housing and preserve and renovate existing stock where that can be done. The housing levy is a key tool for this purpose, as are the payments from the incentive zoning program – \$80,000 is enough to leverage tax credits and levy funds to create a new low income unit, while it costs much more to provide a unit on site. We should be careful about how

we structure the incentive program to ensure that we do have the resources for this level of low income housing.

The second level is what is called 'workforce housing', available for those at 60-80% of median income. While some of this is provided by the market, especially in outer neighborhoods, this is where key tools like the multi-family tax credit and incentive zoning performance on site are critical tools.

It would be great to have all of our neighborhoods include all levels of housing affordability, and we must ensure that all of our neighborhoods have a fair share of low income housing. However, it is more difficult to finance affordable housing where there is new high-rise housing being developed than in other areas where land is less expensive and lower buildings mean lower construction costs. For this reason, it is again important to recognize the tradeoffs and find the right balance between ensuring that all of our neighborhoods have some diversity of housing and being able to take advantage of lower costs in some areas to provide more housing for the available dollars.

It is critical that we increase the supply of housing in general, both to allow the market to provide some check on rents, and to ensure that everyone who wants to be in Seattle has an opportunity to live here. I support continuing to increase our zoning capacity in urban centers and villages and station areas, setting policies that provide reasonable opportunities for infill development, and recognizing the role that micro-units can offer for people who are looking for that kind of residence. Our zoning policies should encourage more cottage housing, more opportunities for Detached Accessory Dwelling Units, and a diversity of multi-family housing types.

The length of time and complexity of our permitting process drives up the cost of housing. If the permitting process is too long and cumbersome, investors will walk away, financing costs increase, and the housing gets more expensive. Since 95% of our housing is developed by the private sector, and demand is outstripping supply, we must focus our permitting process on the aspects that really matter.

Transportation strategies cannot be separated from housing strategies. Our Comprehensive Plan is built around creating urban villages and centers that are linked by walking, bicycling, and transit opportunities to reduce dependence on the private automobile. The more transit we create, and the more housing we concentrate where there are good transit options, the more likely it is that the housing will be affordable. In calculating affordability, a standard assumption is that people can afford to pay 30% of their income for housing, and that 10% of their income goes for transportation. If we can reduce the share that goes for transportation, we can increase their options for finding affordable housing, and that is the core reason why transit oriented development can make such a contribution to providing homes for people. Parking requirement further drive up costs, and transit communities with limited parking will have less expensive housing.

Finally, I worked to increase the size of the last housing levy, and we should continue to increase the size of the housing levy, and keep most of its focus on the lower levels of affordability, while including

some portion for workforce housing in order to help provide balance and take advantage of opportunities for developing that element.