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General Election 2017 City Council Candidate Questionnaire: A Voter Resource

Interfaith Works sent out a questionnaire to candidates running in contested primary races for Council seats in the Cities of Lacey, Olympia and Tumwater. The questions reflect issues of current concern to Interfaith Works.

We believe that the candidate's responses are of great interest to our membership and our many community partners. Our objective is to provide a resource to voters to guide them in their election choices.

Candidate responses are published without editing. Interfaith Works does not endorse any candidate.

City of Olympia Council Member, Position No. 5 General Election Candidates: Allen Miller / Lisa Parshley

1. Please state your plans to increase citizen access to government. For example, how will you include the voices of all of those in our communities – racial and ethnic minorities, the low-income, folks who live in shelters and on the street, youth, our elders and others – in planning for our community's future? What specific plans do you have to reach out to all people so that their concerns and hopes might be heard, and most importantly, be given equal weight when the city council on which you wish to serve makes decisions?

Allen Miller:

As an Olympia School Board member, I spent as much time as possible visiting schools to talk to teachers, students and administrators about issues. I would do the same as a City Council member, visiting the shelters, parks, neighborhoods, food bank, senior services, Safeplace, etc. to make sure I am hearing from all. I pledge to answer every email, phone call, text, or letter I receive from anyone. All should feel welcome to contact me. I will give all viewpoints equal consideration when making decisions.

Lisa Parshley:

a. First, we must openly acknowledge that we have invisible people in our community. Invisible people are those who don't have representation or a voice in our city, county, state, and federal government. They include those of color, members of the LGBTQ

communities, younger and older people, lower income or houseless people, and those of with different religious faiths. Only through openly acknowledging this can we begin to achieve substantive changes in representation and ensure our city government effectively hears everyone's voice.

b. I would recommend a full audit of our city government to catalog hiring, promotion, and firing practices, look at the definition of full/part time, and look at our diversity goals in hiring. Information from this audit can be used to improve our city government through a targeted approach to improving these practices and to develop training around diversity and cultural sensitivity. If we improve our city government's record on inclusiveness we can serve as an example for our community

c. Equally important is a review of where and how the city council interacts with the public and advisory committees. These processes need to be updated and made transparent to allow more honest interaction between the council and the people of the city. This will ensure we have active listening by the city council, fostering people-powered creative solutions for issues such as homelessness, climate change, improving living wages, and diversity.

2. Have you ever been homeless? Known anyone who is homeless? How does that affect your decisions on services your communities could provide? Also regarding homelessness, please give us your thoughts on what a county-wide solution to homelessness would look like.

Allen Miller:

I have never been homeless, but I have worked to alleviate homelessness by building Habitat for Humanity houses and the Drexel House. I also serve meals at the Salvation Army and have been a pro bono attorney for Bread and Roses. I would work with my council colleagues to set up a compassionate 911 system where anyone could call to report a homeless person and a social worker would respond. The social worker would take the person to a homeless triage center where they would be evaluated for their individual needs for mental health, addiction, job training, etc. The person would be given a bed, meal, and entered into the social service system for treatment, and assistance off the streets. I would also make sure that the walking and biking police patrol is present to assist as needed and to help the community be and feel safe. We would increase the ability of the community to rapidly rehouse people through the use of zoning, infill with accessory units, low barrier shelters, tiny houses, habitat for humanity houses, etc. We would need to coordinate with the neighborhoods and the neighboring jurisdictions of Lacey, Tumwater, and Thurston County to make sure that homelessness is addressed on a regional basis.

Lisa Parshley:

Thankfully, I have never been homeless but I have had periods in my life where it was very close; so close I know that a thin line exists between having a roof over your head and being on the street or living in a car. I know several houseless people, those who share the land around my veterinary practices in downtown Olympia. I always try to ask people their name and learn their story. This has taught me that people aren't so different whether they have a roof over their head or seek shelter in doorways.

Housing first and rapid rehousing. It is the most successful method to address homelessness. We also need to help provide services and outreach that addresses the time between landing on the street and getting housing. As a city, we could help with matching funds to provide warming day shelters during the winter and more low barrier shelters. We also need to review the city's land holdings for possible sites for developing housing. We need to reach out as a city to those who live on the street and work with houseless people in Olympia to help us develop these plans. Lastly, we need to reach out and work with our surrounding cities to make it a joint effort and allow shared financial burden and resources. We should be obligated to take care of all our people.

3. Have you ever experienced discrimination based on your age, race, gender, immigrant status or economic standing? Do you know anyone who has experienced these types of discrimination? If so, how does that affect your decisions on city ordinances and policies in these areas?

Allen Miller:

I have never experienced discrimination but know people who have. I have marched and advocated for civil rights since I was a child in the 1960's. I grew up for part of my life in Hawaii and learned early on that we are all in this world together and need to love and respect all humans. When I was United Way Board President, I turned the Board around to make sure its policies did not discriminate against the LGBTQ community. I will make sure that all ordinances and policies will be non-discriminatory and will apply to all equally.

Lisa Parshley:

Yes. As a woman who has been in the sciences, academia, and more recently in medicine. I have suffered direct discrimination and lower wages for equal work and have been overlooked in promotions. All because of my gender. All that gives me an intimate understanding of discrimination and how bigotry can exist sometimes without conscious thought. We have portions of our population that are invisible and thus not represented in our government or in ordinances or zoning or initiatives. For these reasons, I support and will support practices that prevent discrimination due to, sex, gender, race, religion, or age.

4. What specific ideas do you have about law enforcement accountability? Do you support a citizen review board for your city's police department? Why or why not? Do you support the use of body cameras by city police officers? Why or why not?

Allen Miller:

I would work with the Chief and staff to ensure that the police department is run with a community policing philosophy with a citizen review board to hold police accountable. Rather than budgeting for military-type weapons, I would budget for body cameras for all police. These policies will all lead to more transparency and accountability for the police and citizens.

Lisa Parshley:

I think that all government employees and elected officials need to be accountable. When you carry a gun and are allowed to use deadly force in the course of your job this becomes doubly important.

One method of maintaining accountability is via a citizen's review board, but it must have oversight powers, not be merely ceremonial or advisory. This ensures that transparency is maintained during investigations when deadly force is used. It also allows public input on diversity and racial profiling in a police departments.

5. Affordable housing is a concern in our communities. The predicted population growth in Thurston County will only increase the cost of housing. Do you think it is the responsibility of cities to ensure that housing is available for people across a range of economic circumstances? If so, what should be included in your city's planning?

Allen Miller:

The City, as part of the Thurston Thrives Council, should participate in all efforts to maximize the coordination between public and private housing resources and supportive social services, with a particular emphasis on coordinated system entry and rapid re-housing throughout neighboring jurisdictions. We need to build more housing downtown for a variety of income levels. I would use zoning incentives to make sure market rate housing developments have affordable housing included. We also need to ensure that accessory units and infill housing can be built as the urban growth area needs to be denser to avoid sprawl in the rural areas.

Lisa Parshley:

Yes, city governments, and government in general, has a responsibility to be the check that balances the capitalistic interests of corporations or businesses. It needs to be the conscience that provides ethical guidelines for growth, diversity, environmental issues, and health care among other things. Thus, it is the city's responsibility to ensure housing is available across the spectrum of incomes. Without the city enforcing such levels it is very likely builders and developers will not provide adequate lower income housing.

Cities can enforce such guidelines through zoning changes, incentives, and during permitting processes. Zoning laws could be structured to ensure multi-family housing developments have a set number of units that affordable to lower income families. Incentives could include considerations in the impact fees assessed or height bonuses for projects if there are a set number of lower income housing units. Lastly, permitting ultimately governs occupancy of a building. A set number of lower income housing units could be required for permitting, similar to the requirements of having a set number of bathrooms per number of people expected to be in occupancy of a business.

6. In the past year, how many times have you taken public transportation, or traveled in some way other than a single-occupancy vehicle, to work, to city events, or to public meetings? What should cities do to help residents reduce their carbon footprint?

Allen Miller:

I use the bus or bike at least weekly. As a City Council member, I will support infrastructure decisions that will bring us closer to the goal of weaning ourselves off carbon. We could move in this direction through steps such as creating additional carpool-specific parking and implementing other carpooling incentives, as well as supporting investments in additional transit and biking infrastructure. I would convert all streetlights and traffic signals to LED. I would retrofit city buildings for energy and water conservation. I would require solar panels on all city buildings. I would replace gasoline powered vehicles with electric vehicles in the City fleet. I would have the city purchase only green power. I would require the use of only biodiesel in City trucks that could not be electric.

Lisa Parshley:

Every day I walk to coffee in the morning and then back to work. I walk to work every day of the week.

- a) Public transportation that is easy to use and cheap will make leaving the car at home much more palatable.
- b) Sponsor or sign onto a co-op buying program that provides electric cars to the people of Olympia at a greatly reduced cost.
- c) Well planned bike lanes that run virtually everywhere throughout the city and into our neighboring cities.
- d) Joint efforts with Tumwater and Lacey to address all our carbon footprints, through seamless mass transit, joining the electric car co-op, bike lanes, educational forums on how to reduce carbon footprints in neighborhoods and individual homes.
- e) All public buildings should become sites where alternative energy generation occurs through wind generators and solar panels.
- f) Olympia should work with the Port of Olympia, Tumwater, and Lacey to developed farms where we generate alternative energy. These could be developed and maintained on land that is either abandoned, not scheduled for development, or in partnership with landowners.
- g) All public buildings should be fitted with LED light bulbs, insulation upgrades, and evaluation of heating/AC units for efficiency.

7. How will your city be affected by climate change/sea level rise? Does your city have a plan to address these effects, and what more can or should your city do to respond?

Allen Miller:

Olympia is a community that will be significantly impacted by climate change in the coming years. As a member of the City Council, I will work on planning for Olympia's response to climate change. Those with lower incomes will be under the most strain as homes and businesses are threatened by sea level rise. As a community, we must plan for climate change in a way that will provide responses that are equitable for all our residents. I would build the waterfront "Big W Trail" at elevation from the West Bay marina to East Bay in order to provide flood protection and provide public access to the shoreline. We also need to retain the Capitol Lake tide lock which currently is our only flood control protection from high tides.

Lisa Parshley:

Olympia will be affected like most cities around the world, but will be more impacted than surrounding towns as our downtown is at current sea level. Additionally, our state and region will get wetter instead of drier in the coming years. As such we are likely to have more water and arable land than the rest of the country. Thus we will likely be seeing even further growth from eco-refugees.

Our city has joined the Global Covenant of Mayors and has committed to upholding the Paris Accords. Both commitments require we develop a climate action plan. I applaud these commitments and will support these plans if elected. However, many experts say we need to accelerate the timelines set out by both of these plans, that the enact date of 2050 is too late. We need to reset our timeline to enactment by or before 2035. Lastly, to be effective in not just stopping but reducing climate change we need to exceed the mandated carbon emission levels set forth by both the Paris Accords and the Global Covenant of Mayors.

Predicted growth for our region and city has been planned for in the downtown strategy. However, this plan needs to be updated to ensure that it addresses more fully the impact of climate change and sea level rise on our downtown. All options must be kept on the table for addressing the impact of sea level rise on downtown and we need effective zoning changes that ensure our plan has the teeth to control our growth in a sustainable manner. Olympia's growth plan needs to protect established neighborhoods, urban and rural farms, and green spaces through green, sustainable, and progressive high density growth.

We need to take climate change seriously and we need to start mitigating it now. This will take a concerted sustained effort by all Olympia city councils from today to the next century. To do this we must elect people to city council who see climate change as a serious problem requiring thoughtful and creative efforts by our people and our city government.