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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 Tumwater Tumwater City Council Position 5 General Election Candidates: Michael Althausler / Chelsea Rustad

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?

Michael Althausler:

During this campaign, a lot of people have told me that Tumwater has a less active City Council than the other cities in our area. That may be due to a few factors, including the smaller size of our city. But I think we can still be more intentional in our communications with Tumwater residents so everyone feels welcome and knows that their council works for them. In terms of actions I'd take to increase transparency and communications, the first thing I want to do is update our website to be available in Spanish as well as English. We currently don't have this option. I think our newsletters that we send to the public should be in multiple languages as well. I also think that if we want input from low-income communities, we need to meet them where they are, as opposed to expecting them to come to us to share their stories. For instance, when it comes to our homeless population, we need to find the money to send an actual human services outreach specialist to the population to see what types of services they need to access opportunity.

In terms of decision making, I will ensure that everyone has an opportunity to make their voice heard. For my day job, I work as a civil rights attorney on behalf of low-income communities. I represent low-income communities against debt collectors, landlords, and other hostile parties. As a councilmember, I will work hard to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to make their voice heard.

Chelsea Rustad:

I believe it's important to build relationships with all marginalized groups within the community organically by participating on the street in local actions, causes, and organizations. Throughout my campaign, I have been showing up to support the efforts of Washington Won't Discriminate, Whole Washington, Olympia SURJ, Just Housing, Oly DSA, the Olympia IWW, Olympia Community Defense, and Thurston County Progressives. It's not enough for me to say I support these causes; I must earn the trust of these communities with consistent presence, integrity, honesty, and deference to marginalized voices. I will continue participating in local activism and networking with community leaders as a member of city council, centering community discussions around centrally located areas with high accessibility. I will also make use of social media to respond to questions, comments, and concerns, and ensure that everyone has 24/7 access to an open dialogue with me.

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.

Michael Althaus:

I have never been unhoused but have experienced housing instability and poverty in early adulthood. These experiences inspired me to pursue my current work as a civil legal aid attorney. Through my work with Columbia Legal Services, I have served numerous clients experiencing homelessness. One key characteristic regarding homelessness in Tumwater is that it's less visible than in places like downtown Olympia where there is less open space. In my practice, I've met numerous individuals who are houseless and sleep in Tumwater but commute to downtown Olympia during the day because that's where the services are. The first step we need to take is to hire a consultant to do outreach to the population and provide the council with information about our houseless population and about options for services that would help them access opportunity. I also want to work to form an interjurisdictional committee so Tumwater, Olympia, and Lacey can work together to address the problem. This would also help us better address emerging issues like citing and funding for the warming center which unfortunately appears to be tabled for this year.

Chelsea Rustad:

I have had the incredible good fortune in my life never to have experienced homelessness. However, through my support of the Just Housing weekly camp-in events and when addressing local city councils to speak out against ordinances targeting those without homes for harassment, I have met and spoke with several individuals throughout Thurston County who are not housed, or who have endured periods of homelessness. I respect the courage that it takes to share what a day in their life is really like -- the challenges they face with food security, access to reliable shelter, warmer centers, or camping areas, and constant harassment from police and agitators. I believe that food and shelter are human rights, and am disgusted by efforts to chase away or hide the homeless from sight rather than provide any meaningful long term solutions to human beings in great need. To that end, I propose that we use every resource at our disposal to provide permanent solutions in a reasonable time frame, including the appropriation of vacant lots and safe buildings for use by anyone in Thurston County who is without housing. In the

US, empty homes outnumber the homeless 6 to 1, so to suggest we don't have the resources to truly help the homeless rings hollow with me. Allowing our fellow humans to be left outside to the elements, dangers, and harassment that are always plaguing them when we have perfectly good homes that can be lived in is unconscionable and unacceptable.

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?

Michael Althausser:

While I recognize that I grew up with more privilege than most, I have experienced discrimination based on my economic standing in the context of finding rental housing. This has inspired some of my current work with Columbia Legal Services advocating before the legislature to enact a statewide Source of Income Discrimination law. Currently, landlords in many cities can discriminate based on how someone pays their rent – whether it be by cash or voucher (section 8 or HEN). Tumwater has protections for section 8 but our ordinance should go further to also take into account immigration status. With immigrants under constant attack lately, I've heard from clients that some have had their immigration status used as leverage in lease renewal and other everyday housing negotiations. As a councilmember, I will also work to develop a relationship with the county prosecutor and our police department to reduce the cycle of debt and poverty our criminal justice system can routinely create. For example, driving with a suspended license 3 accounts for 25% of all prosecutions statewide and the vast majority of these infractions occur not due to public safety concerns, but rather the inability to pay a fine. This is backwards thinking and we should not be relying on their least able to pay to fund our city government.

Chelsea Rustad:

As a cis het neurotypical white woman in my 30s, I have been shielded from the vast majority of discrimination that those who are Black or brown, LGBTQ, Muslim, neurodivergent, immigrants, or struggling with poverty know as their constant reality. My perception, and others' perception of me, has been shaped by certain assumptions of inherent value or ability based upon the privileges I was born with; therefore I must actively work to confront my own biases and ensure that marginalized voices are centered in all discussions about any particular group within the community. I have certainly experienced sexism in my own life, whether that took the form of catcalling on the street, gendered insults, reproductive coercion from a former partner, and victim-blaming, dismissive attitudes from police when I reported an assault. These lived experiences inform the ways I will protect all women, especially trans women, Black and brown women, and women without access to reproductive health services. I assert that all methods of birth control, as well as menstrual hygiene products, should be made available by the city to all who need them. I recognize that placing women in oppressive positions as cops and CEOs does not actually empower women; this is white feminism working within the context of capitalism. For women to be truly empowered, they must have meaningful representation, they must be believed when they speak about their trauma and harassment, and they must have equitable access to the health care and amenities that all women deserve.

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?

Michael Althausser:

Maintaining a professional, experienced police force is essential to keeping law enforcement accountable. Retaining experienced police officers who hail from the city is a challenge because of higher salaries for officers in neighboring municipalities like Olympia.

I support providing greater training resources to the police department so we can be sure that our force is following new-found best practices. This includes investing in race equity training and awareness as well as de-escalation techniques.

While Tumwater has passed a resolution declaring itself a welcoming city, I would like to pass an ordinance making Tumwater a sanctuary city to send the message that all communities and families are truly welcome, regardless of immigration status. If our neighbors do not call the police because they fear that they will be reported to ICE, then we are failing them. In terms of a citizen review board, Tumwater already has such a committee. Our city Civil Service Commission establishes and administers rules and regulations and governs recruitment, testing, appointments, disciplinary actions, appeals and hearings. I recognize the importance of body cameras and I support body cameras but only if there are adequate sideboards respecting privacy. Too often body cameras are used as tools to conduct unconstitutional searches of property without notice. Also, making video generally available to the public while individuals are filmed without consent presents legal issues. Even large cities like Seattle have struggled with how to deal with privacy concerns and legal liability. Ultimately, I think we will have them in the future and that's a good thing but there are some real issues that need to be ironed out in advance.

Chelsea Rustad:

Police brutality is an emergency in this country; at the time of this writing, 933 people have been killed by police in 2017 alone. Cops are protected by legislation that makes it virtually impossible to achieve a conviction, as well as by a population that justifies their actions regardless of videos, confessions, or the victims being unarmed or disabled. Decisive action is needed to stop the bloodshed and reign in these out of control cops who are free to assault and murder with impunity. To that end, my short-term goal for the police department is to immediately implement a police oversight council composed of citizens representative of all minority groups in Tumwater. This council will have final say in all hiring and firing decisions, including the ability to deny the grotesque paid administrative leave, pensions, and department transfers that typically await officers involved in assaulting or murdering citizens. My long-term goal is to abolish the police department entirely, and replace it with a model of community-led patrols. Similar to the Olympia Community Defense group I have helped organize, community patrols would provide expanded community services not typically offered by police, such as self-defense training, rideshares to the food banks, de-escalation of potentially dangerous situations by professionals, and other forms of mutual aid. The goal will be to get to the root of the problems that can push people to engage in criminal activity or violent behavior in the first place, and redefine what it means to be a public servant.

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?

Michael Althaus:

Housing accessibility and affordability is a priority for my campaign. Tumwater is projected to experience much growth over the next 20 years. The city estimates that we'll need 7,000 units to meet that need, which would be a transformative increase in housing. We'll have to grow but need to do so in a smart way that keeps housing accessible and affordable for all our families. One key component of affordable housing is maintaining our stock of less expensive units. In boom years (like today), cheap housing units are often developed into more expensive stock. This is particularly true for mobile home communities. Tumwater's mobile home parks are in rapid decline as the value of land has increased. Redevelopment of these communities displaces hundreds of families and also destroys their equity in their property as most mobile homes are now too old to move. I'd like to see the city invest in these communities and liaise with the current land owners to see if they would be willing to sell to existing homeowners

rather than redeveloping them. We also need to increase density within the city along our transit spine. Tumwater has little mixed use and our density provisions are outdated (for instance, you can't have a duplex in single family medium density zones). We also need to make it easier to add additional density to current plots. For instance, we could make it easier to add ADUs to existing properties.

Chelsea Rustad:

I am very concerned about the state of affordable housing in Tumwater, especially as the population of Tumwater increases and the conversations during campaign season so frequently turn to renewing the brewery district. Studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between the increased presence of breweries in an area and the gentrification of that area, leading to increased housing costs and a higher percentage of white residents. My stance is that if we are to invest in the brewery district, we must demonstrate an even stronger commitment to maintaining and expanding affordable housing options throughout the city. One of the ways we can do that is to incentivize the development of more affordable housing units within city limits and ensuring proximity to public transit. Another way is to emulate the actions taken by Seattle's city council to address rising housing costs; while rent control is illegal in the state of Washington (for now), last year the Seattle city council passed an ordinance which caps the move-in money landlords are allowed to charge, and which gives renters the right to pay their move-in costs in installments. A Tenant Relocation Assistance Ordinance for Tumwater would provide money in assistance to low-income tenants who have been evicted. I will work with experts in the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance to find solutions that will work best for low income residents of Tumwater, and will use my platform and resources to work with likeminded officials in the fight to pass rent control.

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?

Michael Althaus:

I ride the bus to work regularly and also take the Sounder to Seattle when I have to work up there. I recently got a new bike and would ride it to work but to be honest, Tumwater has a lot of work to do building out its bike lanes and it is simply too treacherous at 8 AM for me to comfortably ride to downtown Olympia. I'd like to see us incentivize development along our transit spine by creating a multi family housing tax exemption in the Brewery District and along Capitol Way. If this tax credit is couple with mandatory affordable housing, we could increase density along our transit spine while also increasing our affordable housing in the city. This would also increase walkability within the city (our city-wide walk score is about 30; incredibly low).

Traffic is a major issue in Tumwater that will be compounded by the rapid population growth that is projected for our region. We need to work with the cities of Olympia and Lacey and our regional transit authority to improve accessibility to public transportation options.

Chelsea Rustad:

As the only person at my home with a car, I drive my fiancé to work in the mornings and pick him up afterward so we can travel together on my way to work. He takes the bus when needed for appointments, and he has told me numerous times that Thurston County has some of the best, most effective public transportation anywhere in the state. However, there is still room for improvement – what if public transportation with city limits were free? In addition, we have hybrid buses on Tumwater routes, but I would like to see a transition to a 100% EV fleet for all state or city-owned vehicles used within the city of Tumwater. In addition, consumers would love to save money on gas by using an electric vehicle, but these are still out of the price range of the average buyer when sold new. Therefore, the city should further incentivize the purchase

of new or used fully electric vehicles, as well as providing a comprehensive gasoline vehicle buyback program to encourage a widespread transition to electric vehicle usage in the city. Our infrastructure should accommodate these changes accordingly with an abundance of high speed public charging stations, and we must continue to support the safety of pedestrians and bikers by addressing the many areas throughout Tumwater which are lacking sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

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?

Michael Althaus:

Climate change is the issue of our generation, it will have varied effects on all our communities. The effects of climate change do not occur in a vacuum and the consequences of sea level rise in downtown Olympia will be felt in Tumwater and the greater Thurston County region. Tumwater has affirmed the threat of climate change and has worked with regional partners to reduce our community's carbon footprint and to adequately plan for the future. Recently, the city invested more than \$2M to increase energy efficiency within the city. We also installed solar panels on some of our public buildings (like the fire station on Israel) to further reduce our footprint. I support creating a high-density core along Capitol Way and working with our partners to improve public transportation accessibility in Tumwater and the region. Additionally, the city must continue to work with the Thurston Climate Action Team to develop innovative ways to address climate change.

Chelsea Rustad:

Downtown Olympia is more at risk to flooding from sea level rise than Tumwater, but that does not mean we must confront these issues with any less urgency. Climate change and sea level rise are associated with a number of worrisome predicted changes for areas throughout western Washington, including Tumwater. Among these are drier, hotter summers (increased risk of heat waves, wildfires, and lower air quality), altered precipitation patterns (wetter winter months, more frequent/intense storms, flood events), and expanded territory for disease-carrying or disease-causing organisms such as mosquitos and shellfish. We cannot wait for these problems to devastate our communities and natural resources; our plans to combat climate change and sea level rise must be forward-thinking rather than reactive. To this end, I propose a plan to transition Tumwater away from dependence upon coal and other fossil fuels into a green economy through the use of sustainable, renewable energy for city facilities and vehicles. The city should accommodate and encourage the use of community gardens to reduce food waste and save the resources needed to grow, process, and transport food. To counter sea level rise, we must have emergency response plans and services at the ready for the most vulnerable members of our community (the isolated, the elderly, families with young children, and the homeless), enforce safety regulations that protect our natural resources, and always prioritize environmental protections over profits.