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Primary 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. 6 Primary Candidates: Jeannine Roe / Renata Rollins / Michael Snodgrass

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?

Jeannine Roe:

I will continue to be an open, accessible voice for all citizens of the City of Olympia. As Chair of the General Government Committee, our goal is to bring the council out to the public rather than the expectation that folks will come to the Council Chambers. As they stand now, our meetings are very limited and structured. A 3 minute comment time is not sufficient to hear the views of our citizens, which is why it's important to reach out to the community. I would also like to continue conversations with CYS, Family Support Services and Interfaith Works to help us accomplish this goal.

As said above, I would ask for input from the various non-profits to help facilitate conversations amongst all of our community. I have often requested that we bring the "human voice" to our various committees – such as my request to create the Artesian Well Ad Hoc Committee. We need to hear all aspects of an issue not just those typically involved in government.

Renata Rollins:

This question gets at the essence of my campaign, and the way I seek out information and develop my priorities in my personal and public life. From my time as an outreach worker and a journalist, I know it's not enough to invite voices in. You have to actively seek out people who are "difficult to engage," and go where people are.

City Council members should in essence be outreach workers. Hold town halls and listening sessions in the outlying neighborhoods, in shelters, retirement homes, at the well. Show up for community causes like the Andre and Bryson trial or Zahid Chaudry's pending deportation hearing, Blintzapalooza, and community-organized symposia and events. Keep connected to people, period—not just people who donate to campaigns. This is the only way to truly understand an issue: by knowing how a decision will affect everyone. Otherwise, you only hear from those with the capacity to show up to a formal meeting. As a candidate I am most known for my community organizing and advocacy work on housing & homelessness. But it's important for voters to know, I came to this issue not because of personal experience, but personal relationships—the path of listening, understanding, and integrating diverse experiences into my worldview.

Michael Snodgrass:

As candidates we reach out to voters and constituents and then we forget about them if elected. I would continue the process as an elected official by walking through the streets and getting feedback, doorbelling under represented neighborhoods to get feedback, and having townhalls with neighborhoods. I would go to the people instead of making them come to city hall.

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.

Jeannine Roe:

I have great empathy for those who are most vulnerable in our city and nation at large. When I see people on the streets, especially those with young children, my heart breaks. There are many reasons why someone might be living on the streets, so I think it's important to look at a holistic approach to address these concerns. I strive to do all I can, as a City Council Member, to help those who are homeless.

A countywide solution would be ideal! I have represented the City of Olympia for the past 6 years on the HOME Consortium, CIP (Community Investment Partnership) as well as the Thurston Thrives Coordinating Council. Currently, I am a member of the Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness and Housing. Olympia is taking the lead by adding a measure to the ballot this spring asking voters to supply a revenue base for additional housing and services for our low income. Ideally, this will someday include our neighboring communities of Lacey, Tumwater and Thurston County. Olympia alone cannot eliminate homelessness but I am proud of our community for pursuing this. I have long advocated for a REGIONAL approach to this issue. Every community, including South County, should be involved in helping out those in need.

Renata Rollins:

Ending the homelessness crisis is my top priority. My heart is with our neighbors living on the streets, in greenbelts and shelters. I have never been homeless, though I know many people who are homeless here. I've worked in street outreach in Olympia for Capital Recovery Center, Partners in Prevention

Education, and grassroots projects I founded. I've attended Meg Martin's Interfaith Works Shelter training. Last year I co-founded Just Housing, which organizes and advocates for rights and safety of unhoused people. One of our first public actions was operating a 72-hour emergency popup shelter last October, in grateful partnership with Interfaith Works, during an early autumn storm. Just Housing also successfully advocated for more 24/7 restrooms downtown. A countywide solution involves immediate stopgap services, longer-term affordable housing plans, and prevention measures.

Stopgaps: Homeless people need safe, legal places to live. If there are no appropriate places, people can only choose inappropriate ones. Day centers, shelters & basic staffed campgrounds with toilets/trash pickup are reasonable health & safety measures. These could be in partnership with other cities, the county, the Port of Olympia, and local nonprofits.

Long term: We need affordable housing for people on disability income making \$200-700/month. We can incentivize affordable housing development, and update zoning to make it easy to build tiny homes/low-cost units. I support the intent of the Home Fund, though I'm troubled it became a sales tax proposal rather than a property levy.

Prevention: Tenant protections such as requiring just cause evictions, and preventing discrimination based on credit, source of income, etc. Additionally we need more accessible mental health services so people don't fall into homelessness due to a symptom flare-up.

Michael Snodgrass:

No I have never been homeless. However, I do work alongside homeless individuals in my second job as newspaper delivery person. I have heard their stories and listened to their challenges they face to get back on their feet again. Homelessness is a regional problem and should be addressed as such. The homeless population is not a monolithic generic group of individuals. There are various issues that the homeless face and there is no one solution for all of them.

I support the ballot initiative to build 250 apartment homes for the most vulnerable of our citizens. I am an enthusiastic supporter of having wrap around services housed in the same location. However, I do believe it is a regional issue and not just an Olympia city issue. This will help a certain segment of our homeless population. In addition, the city needs to work with non profits and business partners to create a bridge for those homeless who may be working or came about as a result of an economic or health care situation. This section of the population just needs financial assistance or temporary services in order to get back on their feet again. All Thurston County jurisdictions should be involved in providing these services.

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?

Jeannine Roe:

Yes – as a woman who has worked in state government for many years, I have experienced discrimination to a certain degree based on both my age and gender.

I am a strong advocate for equality based on all of the above; age, race, gender, immigrant status and economic standing. I am proud of the Council for passing the Sanctuary City Resolution earlier this year and for taking a strong stand for our citizens. I have also been a solid supporter of the City's efforts to provide equal opportunity for all employees and continue to look for a stronger representation from our minority populations on our Boards and Commissions.

Renata Rollins:

I have experienced discrimination based on gender, economic standing, and sexual orientation. I have also learned a lot from people who have experienced discrimination based on race, housing status, age, and visible disability. I do my best to approach all social issues through the lens of intersectionality. What that means to me is that all forms of oppression are different but related, and that to solve any pattern of inequality we must be conscious of and work on all of them.

As a community organizer, I believe it's important for leaders to free themselves from the savior complex and instead have the humility to learn how to solve problems by hearing and learning from the people facing them. I am connected to diverse marginalized communities and would maintain those connections in order to stay informed and to stay accountable. I know from experience that equity doesn't just happen. It has to be fought for, it has to be codified, and it requires transparency so we can maintain vigilance.

Michael Snodgrass:

Yes I have experienced age discrimination recently. As I have changed careers recently I went through a number of job applications, interviews, and questionnaires and on more than a few examples my age was mentioned in some capacity. I was competing with mostly younger individuals and my age almost always came up in a conversation during an interview. It was termed in such a way as to not be obvious but I was still uncomfortable being called "seasoned, veteran, or experienced" within the context of a question. I believe we need to redouble our efforts to reach out to our disenfranchise communities and work with them to bring them into the conversation and to the table.

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?

Jeannine Roe:

We continue to provide training for our police officers and have put great emphasis on this effort over the past two years. I voted in favor of putting a Public Safety Measure on the ballot this fall. This revenue, in part, will help fund additional de-escalation training for our officers.

I look forward to continuing conversations as to the pros and cons of forming a citizen review board and remain open to the idea.

I support the use of body cameras, however, we are faced with many challenges as to the use and actual storage of videos, privacy issues, staffing issues and legality. I look forward to the State of WA continuing their work on making it accessible and reasonable for all of our enforcement community to wear body cameras.

Renata Rollins:

Part of my platform is for more accountability of law enforcement agencies, and I support a community review board, as well as examining and revamping OPD's hiring practices, which draw candidates from a national pool rather than people with ties to the local community. I am not convinced about body cameras. From reading national news, it seems like whenever there is a suspicious death in police custody, somehow the camera malfunctions.

I think the workable and effective approach is bridging better relationships. Years ago at PiPE (a violence prevention organization for young survivors of violence who are homeless and/or queer/trans)

organizers held “Donut Dialogues” between patrol officers and street youth. Relationship-building cannot consist of a few token meetings but must be active, ongoing and built into the culture of the department.

I also support creation of police alternatives, such as the Downtown Ambassadors, where I was the team lead for a year. I think there is room for more community-based programs like this, especially when it comes to supporting immigrant communities, communities of color, and others who are fearful of police.

The shift we need isn’t a matter of adding on a de-escalation course to the curriculum. The entire paradigm needs to shift toward de-escalation and community care, rather than fearing, spotting and neutralizing the bad guys. The old adage applies here: When all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.

I will add that this is a larger cultural shift that needs to occur; it is not limited to police departments.

Michael Snodgrass:

First, I do not believe the police are the problem within the community. I have great admiration for our law enforcement and am impressed by their restraint. Having said that I always believe additional training is a positive goal. I support the use of body cameras wholeheartedly as it promotes transparency and accountability. Good law enforcement officers have nothing to fear from body cameras. I also support a citizen review board as I think there needs to be an independent body that can oversee the police department. I do not believe they should micro manage the police department but would be a positive step in providing civilian oversight.

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?

Jeannine Roe:

While I don’t think it is feasible to say the city council can ensure that every person is able to obtain housing, I do believe it is a joint effort with everyone to be involved - city, county, state, non-profits, realtors, builders, and developers - the community in general. It is imperative that everyone digs in and endeavors to find housing for all. As a city we need to do everything we can to help people find housing and get off of the streets. It is a priority.

We are currently looking at several avenues – the “missing middle” which would allow people to build tiny houses, additions to their homes, allowing for more density in our neighborhoods. I am also supportive of the Housing Ballot Measure which will provide revenue for housing and services for our most vulnerable. There are also a variety of measures being considered: Rentals – extending the length of the notice period for people to vacate, requiring a percentage of apartment complexes be rented at lower than market rate, etc.

Renata Rollins:

We are in an affordable housing and homelessness emergency, and we can’t count on the federal government to save us. It is absolutely the responsibility of not only cities, but also Thurston County, and perhaps the Port of Olympia as well, as a major landholder. We should always look for partnerships, but a lack of partners doesn’t justify inaction.

We must increase housing inventory, especially for those who can't afford \$1600 in rent for a "market rate" apartment. We can increase affordable housing inventory through incentives and updated zoning. Incentives in the form of property tax breaks could attract projects such as Single Resident Occupancy apartments, rooms available to students, artists, or people earning the disability income of around \$700/month. Updating our zoning could make it easier to build tiny homes and other quick-build options that not only provide places affordable to live, but also places within a regular neighborhood (literally in someone's backyard) instead of in an isolated project.

Lastly, the sad reality is: A tent is the only housing many people can afford, people on disability, people awaiting disability, people not making enough at work. The city of Olympia and other jurisdictions need to face this reality, and provide safe, legal, staffed campgrounds, with toilets and trash pickup. It's a matter of safety and public health.

Michael Snodgrass:

The city can assist the process of providing affordable housing by creating tax incentives and other means by which private developers can create more affordable housing. I am cautious as to exactly what the details are in a given proposal as some ideas can actually cause the reverse to occur by driving out new construction. I am uncomfortable with the word ensure in the question as it infers a guarantee and I do not think cities can guarantee that. However, by ordinance, regulation, and incentives I think cities can promote affordable housing especially in the downtown area.

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?

Jeannine Roe:

Not as much as I would like! I would love to see our Transit system grow and be more accessible to citizens throughout the City. Many bus stops were eliminated several years ago due to budget cuts. I am hopeful that we can bring back more public transportation so that it becomes more of a second nature to not just jump in a car but use public transit. The City is always looking for ways to improve walkability, biking lanes and a more pedestrian friendly environment, particularly in our downtown.

What should cities do? Promoting the use of transit, walking more, carpooling, driving energy efficient cars, etc. Take advantage of the energy efficiency audits we have available through our Utility Department as well as PSE.

Renata Rollins:

I frequently bike, walk, and have bussed just a couple times in the last year. Improved mass transit is a huge piece of reducing our carbon footprint, as half of CO2 emissions come from vehicles. Unfortunately, under current service levels, many people can't depend on the bus to get to work and other daily activities. The transit system wasn't designed with swing/graveyard shift workers in mind, even though lower-wage workers would benefit from not having to budget for a car. The city should take the lead on communicating a vision of a mass transit system with expanded hours, more frequent routes, and lower/free fares, and work with Intercity Transit and local jurisdictions to realize this vision. This is about environment, quality of life and affordability.

More bicycle infrastructure is helpful—everything from covered bike racks to more bicycle corridors to complement the pilot project connecting Lions Park to Sylvester Park. The improved bicycle crossing at

Plum and 7th Ave is part of this bike corridor and makes the road more accessible and safe for bicyclists. It's a great start.

The sidewalks downtown are in disrepair and that makes them less accessible to many people who use walkers, wheelchairs and strollers. Repaired and widened sidewalks would support a pedestrian-friendly downtown neighborhood with enough room for pedestrians and busking musicians to keep the place lively.

Finally, we need to preserve our natural spaces, as trees absorb carbon dioxide.

Michael Snodgrass:

This is a passion of mine. I enthusiastically support all means of mass transit. I did use the bus in my previous job to get to work and back when available. As the urban center grows it is imperative that we allow our mass transit systems to grow also. I would continue to subsidize our systems and would seek to expand them as the city grows. Last spring and summer I used mass transit approximately 40 times. This summer I have used it approximately 15 times.

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?

Jeannine Roe:

Over the past few years we have increasingly studied and made climate change/sea level rise a priority issue for our city. We have received numerous reports that show us how sea level rise will dramatically affect our downtown community. Unfortunately, the bulk of our city is built on fill. As we continue to grow and build we are asking developers to adjust their plans accordingly to address sea level rise.

We have hired a consultant, along with the Port of Olympia, and are looking at a variety of ways to approach it. Such measures as dikes being built, mandating that new construction be built at a higher level, etc. is being evaluated and considered. Andy Haub of the City of Olympia is highly involved and the City of Olympia is actually considered a leader on the West Coast for its innovative leadership and proactive actions.

Renata Rollins:

Regarding sea level rise: Downtown Olympia was built on fill, and much of it will flood in less than 100 years. A plan is in the works, but I'm afraid there are some inherent flaws in the process.

First, we have sea level predictions for the next 100 years, and we know sea levels will continue to rise over the next several centuries, yet we are only working on a 20-year plan. Timeline makes a big difference when it comes to what response will be most cost effective and practical over time. Let's make a 100-year plan.

Second, despite lip service about community engagement, the city has already committed to the strategy of "defending" downtown and incentivizing new development there, despite alternative responses raised by the public that I believe deserve consideration. All options should be on the table. I love downtown Olympia; and, I also want to respect natural systems. This may be an opportunity to have stronger neighborhood centers where people can live and work in the same neighborhood, which has the dual benefit of decreasing automobile use.

Regarding climate change generally: One of the priorities must be promoting local food production to guard against food supply instability. We should incentivize land used for local food production and relax regulations on uses of property for homesteading. To me it's a matter of community resiliency.

Also, we need to prepare for an increase of climate refugees in Olympia and the Puget Sound area in general. This points back to the need for affordable housing, discussed in Question 5.

Michael Snodgrass:

The city does not yet have a comprehensive plan to deal with the rising sea level. This is something the city of Olympia needs to be proactive on by addressing it now. There are a variety of measure the city can look at. They have already changed zoning so now any new construction has to be built one foot above the sea level. The city should look at all of the options available to them such as redirection of stormwater runoff, build up of land around Capital Lake, dams or dikes, etc.