SHSC 2019 online candidate survey questions

What is your name?
Don Harper

1. For which position are you running?
Seattle City Council District 7

2. What do you know about the unmet basic human needs in the district you would represent?

I have been aware for decades that there are a previously unseen number of people who are in need of some of the basics most of us take for granted. Based on my understanding of the needs of our community, I have contributed to three organizations for years: (1) food banks because no one should go hungry in America; (2) DESC to rescue the people that need permanent supportive housing; and (3) the Millionaire Club to teach people how to get back on their feet with skills and a job. The homeless crisis has shown me in greater detail how more needs to be done to create permanent supportive housing and then to invest in more job training to make it possible for people to support themselves.

3. What has afforded you the privilege and power to run for office, and how will it impact your role in this position?

Being a citizen of the United States of America has allowed me the privilege of running for elected office. I have been a member of the Queen Anne Community Council for over 20 years and chair of the QACC Parks Committee where I have volunteered thousands of hours in the QA & Magnolia communities and throughout Seattle as a 7 year member of two Parks Levy Citizen Oversight Committees. The 2006 Gap Analysis about neighborhoods proximity to parks (1/4 mile is the goal) introduced to me the need to work and encourage communities to the south to engage with Parks to create more parks. As a whole, the Oversight Committees worked hard to give special consideration
to projects in the areas with the lowest met criteria. On QA we have been very receptive to including low income and affordable housing in our neighborhoods believing that everyone deserves quality schools. I am looking forward to making the homeless emergency, as declared by Mayor Murray 7 years ago, a reality by truly prioritizing funding to building permanent supportive housing.

4. What experience do you have in listening to and amplifying community voices? In what ways do you base your policies and priorities on the needs of those who will be most impacted by them?

As a member of the QA Community Council I engage with the other communities around QA to create more comprehensive solutions and this is most important when working with City and Regional authorities. To have effective results, you need to rise above your own neighborhood and see the larger picture. I believe that our current city council has failed to do this.

5. The cost of health care increases every year. Recent federal policy changes have threatened the long-term sustainability of Medicaid — such as attempts to reduce funding or turn the program into a block grant — and have aimed to undermine the viability of private health insurance markets — such as eliminating the individual insurance mandate from the Affordable Care Act (ACA) or not defending the ACA in court. Given so many barriers being placed at the federal level, how would you work to improve health care access at the local level to ensure stronger and more vibrant communities?

This is an issue that must be solved on the federal and state level. Seattle alone cannot make much of a dent in this problem, but we can more robustly support the access of our seniors and low income residents in obtaining transportation to their medical appointments. While the current times look bleak we must continue fighting. On the federal level we must raise substantially the salary level of where paying into Social
Security and Medicare currently stops. Washington State has made a significant move by providing a public option for health insurance.

6. Federal policies over the last few years have created a climate of fear for immigrant and refugee communities across the country. Even Washington State, long a welcoming environment, is no stranger to these challenges, as the recent Department of Licensing scandal showed. This climate of fear impacts immigrants and refugees of all statuses, and new research shows this fear is driving immigrants away from health and human services programs they are legally eligible to participate in. What would you do to leverage local systems and resources to bring immigrant and refugee communities back out of the shadows?

The Seattle Department of Neighborhoods is where we can have the most impact. DON is already working hard to engage our immigrant and refugee communities. We also need to require Parks to once again fully fund our community centers back to the full use hours of 2007 and to fund the significant remodels needed to the eight centers that have been so neglected. Community centers are exactly what the names imply. They are in all of our communities and provide a safe place for people to meet and for DON to have a presence.

7. Over half Seattelites and over 40% of people in King County are renters. Currently in most of Washington State tenants can be forced to move with only 20 days’ notice and even within the city of Seattle, there is no guarantee that a landlord will renew a tenant's lease. [For King County Candidates] As part of the King County Council, will you enact just cause protections to give tenants stability? [For Seattle Candidates] As part of Seattle City Council, will you expand just cause protections for renters with fixed term leases who are up for a lease
renewal? [For both] What are your plans and strategies to protect renters?

On the face of it I can see where just cause protection may be legislation I will support but I will need to see more details and engage with both renters and owners to understand the full effect of these types of rules. I am open to working with both sides to find common ground and it may be possible to have different standards for small owners and larger corporate owners.

8. In 2018, the consulting firm McKinsey and Company conducted an extensive analysis of the current crisis response and homeless housing programs in Seattle and King County. They found that our region dramatically under-invests in housing and other system-wide responses, while the numbers of people experiencing homelessness grows. They found that between 2014 and 2017, the number of households accessing homelessness services grew by an average 11 percent a year, while funding grew by an average 2.4 percent a year. The McKinsey analysis estimated an additional investment of between $360 and $410 million per year for at least ten years is required to make and maintain progress in solving homelessness. Such added resources would bring our community in line with sister cities and counties addressing homelessness and affordable housing crises. What are three specific revenue options (local, regional, and state) you would use to generate the necessary funds to fill the gap between current local, state, and federal dollars, and the housing and service system investments required to do the job for Seattle and King County residents experiencing homelessness?

I will support performance audits of all departments, the Mayor’s office, and the City Council. From past experience this will save money that can be reallocated to finally follow Barbara Poppe’s report. We need to work with advocacy groups like Cascade Bicycle Club and Greenways to delay their wants and concentrate on building
permanent supportive housing. We are investing over $450 million in a waterfront park that is mostly a tree-lined boulevard. We need to re-prioritize our wants and focus on our needs. I am in support of these advocacy groups and the Waterfront Park but the City Council and Mayor do not seem to want to make the grown up choice that we can’t have everything we want and also solve the homeless crisis. We cannot do it alone. We must take a regional approach and get the surrounding counties and cities to be apart of a unified approach. The State needs to help our region with additional monies as we are absorbing most of the needy.

9. Seattle and King County are in the midst of a child care crisis because child care is expensive and unaffordable for many working families. At the same time, some child care providers cannot afford to pay workers a living wage and stay in business. What ideas do you have for solutions?

I support Seattle’s Child Care Assistance Program. I am willing to look at how we can add additional funding to the program.

10. Survivors of gender-based violence frequently enter the criminal justice system due to their victimization, but criminal justice responses are woefully inadequate and problematic for most survivors for a variety of reasons, especially Black, indigenous, and other survivors of color, refugee and immigrant survivors; and gender non-conforming survivors. What specific solutions will you bring forward for addressing issues of gender-based violence in our city? What mechanisms would you employ to shift the structural oppression and racism, specifically in criminal justice institutions?

Education is the key. You can mandate inclusion and sensitivity but to make real change you need to get people to want to change. We need to engage our emergency services and law enforcement people into effective inclusion training. I do support a number of the initiatives put forth by the Public Defenders Association.
11. Describe how you would represent your constituents to ensure there is a pathway to emergency food services for all who need it. What policies and investments would you support so that residents across Seattle and King County have equal access to adequate, culturally appropriate, healthy food?

I support and encourage others to support our food banks. Using our community centers and the Department of Neighborhoods, we can help our less fortunate community members with applying for food assistance. We can encourage more delivery services to those in need, such as Meals on Wheels.

12. According to a 2017 FBI report, nationwide reports of hate crimes increased by 17% from 2016 to 2017; by 32% in Washington State, and 198% in Seattle. Within Washington State, 38% of reported hate crimes were in Seattle. The City Auditor analyzed data that reported hate crimes doubled from 2014 to 2016 and doubled again from 2016 to 2018. 54% of the crimes related to race/ethnicity and 32% sexual orientation. What are your ideas for responding to hate crime in our region without criminalizing communities of color?

I have been a decades long supporter of the Southern Poverty Law Center. I will encourage our educators to avail themselves of the many teaching syllabuses available for all ages from preschool through high school. This is a long-term solution to the both conscious and unconscious biases many of us grow up with. Short term we need to engage our emergency services and law enforcement people into effective inclusion training. We need to recognize how difficult this will be as often, like a doctor, there is a certain amount of emotional disengagement that must happen to survive the trauma of the job.

13. As a city, we have moved to district representation. However, the needs of our residents are not necessarily most efficiently and
effectively addressed by district. Nonprofit services most often cross multiple districts and people who make use of the services interact with providers throughout the city. How will you work to represent both the needs of your district as well as Seattle as a whole?

I will be representing District 7 and it will be a part of the job description to be proactive for my district. That being said the homeless crisis, housing needs, transportation, and utilities know no boundaries. I will work with my other council members and reach out to community councils throughout the city to make sure I maintain an all-city perspective.

14. Will you support an automatic annual inflation adjustment tied to the CPI-W for the City's human services contracts so providers can maintain current levels of service as costs of doing business increase?

On the face of it my answer is yes but I will first need to understand the effect on the budget for these services. It is usual that an inflationary amount is included in long-term budgets but I need to better understand what else in the city budget we would need to cut to meet this kind of a firm obligation.