SHSC 2019 online candidate survey questions

What is your name?
Emily Myers

1. For which position are you running?
Seattle City Council District 4

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

District four has a longstanding youth homelessness crisis, centered around the University District. The youth shelter, ROOTS, which provides shelter for up to 45 teens on any given night is being torn down in the next year without a known "next home". The Ave will continue to have Teen Feed, which provides meals for homeless youth as well as caseworkers, but the shelter options will be diminished. Students at the UW report both food and housing insecurity, needs which the UW should do more to meet. The state reductions in funding have hit students with high financial need hard, and there should be more collaboration between the city, state, and university to guarantee UW students are not going hungry or living in their cars. U District does not have LEAD which means that many of the actions decriminalized by LEAD are still treated as crimes in this area. This affects police interactions with citizens and maintains a carceral approach to behavioral health services. There is an impending crisis when the People’s Harm Reduction Alliance closes. PHRA has served both as a supply of clean needles and, more recently, meth pipes, but also as a space that provides judgment free support for drug users. It will be torn down in the next year, and without a replacement, injection drug users and meth users will have less access to clean paraphernalia, increasing risk of HIV and Hep C transmission. District 4 needs a city facility -- with needle exchange, suboxone and methadone therapy, and a safe consumption site, to support drug users, reduce overdose death, and provide more access to harm reduction therapies. One of the only "reproductive health care" options in the U District is a Crisis Pregnancy Center, 3W Medical, which markets itself to vulnerable young women for STD testing and pregnancy monitoring. They do not offer any forms of birth control or abortion referrals.
They attend the U District Street Fair and pass out literature on campus. The city should do more to direct vulnerable young adults to holistic reproductive health options, including the Roosevelt Planned Parenthood. We need more low barrier, low cost health services so that these young folks in need aren’t left with services like 3W as the only option. The communities at Magnuson Park, including low-income public housing residents, live in a food desert. The closest grocery stores are Metropolitan Market and PCC which are luxury grocery stores that serve the wealthy surrounding neighborhoods. It is nearly 2 miles to Safeway. Additionally, the community center at Magnuson Park which serves as a recreational facility for folks living here has reported asbestos and lead paint, as found in a September 2017 city report. We must work to address these health concerns. There is an unmet need for interim measures to support people experiencing homelessness in our district. We need more public bathrooms, access to showers and laundry facilities, trash services and sharps containers. The money currently being spent on cruel and costly encampment sweeps can be deferred to support humane support while we build the affordable and supportive housing we need.

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

My scientific outreach and advocacy, as well as my organizing and activism against workplace sexual harassment, has enabled me to build an incredible network of supporters. My privilege to run for office stems from having two college educated parents. While I was not wealthy and experienced housing insecurity, the expectation of higher education pushed me to get a degree in Molecular Biology, and I am now finishing a PhD in Pharmacology. I am also white, and have benefitted from white privilege, including institutional structures that reward and default to whiteness and oppress people of color. I am able to run for office while completing my degree due to a supportive mentor and advisor, and the support of many of my colleagues both at the University of Washington and beyond. As I have grown my network throughout my PhD, focusing on building experience with science policy work, I applied for the Emerge WA program, which trains democratic women to run for office. Through scholarships and other support, I completed this program, which has both given me a tremendous amount of training, but also opened up my network to folks I previously did not have access to. This privilege, through both education and my networks, helps me gather
resources, policy experts, union support, and the training to be an effective, evidence-driven, collaborative leader. Through my anti-racism work, I am continuously learning how to use my privilege to support and amplify people of color, immigrants, and indigenous people. It is not enough to recognize white privilege, but white people must work to break down institutions of oppression, follow the leadership of POC, and constantly re-evaluate our privilege and perspective to ensure we do not perpetuate harm. I will bring this lens to my policymaking.

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?

My union, UAW4121, is a deeply democratic union. Our bargaining campaign began with many conversations across the unit, followed by an open ended unit wide survey, determining the needs of the student community, This survey then led to a secondary survey which took the top answers and polled the student employees. We were then able to vote on the finalized bargaining agenda. It was through this process that we decided that fighting for pay raises, lowered fees, better protections against harassment and discrimination, trans-inclusive healthcare would be the priority of our bargaining campaign. When we reached the point in bargaining that the University would not guarantee trans-inclusive healthcare or more funding to support sexual harassment training, our unit stood together and participated in a x-thousand member one-day strike. This experience showed me that when we start by listening to our community, and amplify the needs of the most marginalized, we can build collective action. In building my campaign platform, I’ve taken a similar approach. Our campaign put out our policies later than several other major campaigns, because we took the time to sit down with front line workers, affected communities, and experts as we built out policy statements about climate justice, affordable childcare, criminal justice reform, homelessness services, and affordable housing. For example, our approach to affordable childcare centers on making sure that childcare workers, who are disproportionately women of color and immigrant women, have access to living wages and stable placements. Some of the “solutions” for childcare affordability and childcare quality are made on the back of these workers, so we listened to these childcare
workers and policy experts to propose strategies that can reduce these costs for families without burdening these workers.

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?

I have been an advocate for Universal Healthcare in the past, including using my background as a biomedical scientist to advise the Alliance for a Healthy Washington. The state legislator is gaining momentum to create our own healthcare plans, which is very exciting as I believe access to high quality healthcare is a human right. At a local level, I am working with current councilmember Teresa Mosequda to support her legislation to ensure gig economy workers have healthcare. As mentioned above, I am an executive board member in my union UAW4121, and was a leader last year as we bargained with UW. Management’s original proposal planned in increase health premiums and decrease coverage. We proposed better mental health coverage, no increase in premiums, and trans-inclusive healthcare. In order to win these, our union voted over 90% to go on strike after UW could not provide trans-inclusive care because “it had not been done before.” I believe unions and worker’s bill of rights are an avenue to ensure workers have access to healthcare, and will stand with workers to fight for these benefits. Additionally, I believe that our shelters, food banks, etc should have caseworkers with effective training in signing folks up for medicaid or getting on the Washington exchange. Two major gaps are reproductive health and mental health services, which are not fully funded through federal plans and lead to disproportionate impacts on our most vulnerable. With the recent increase in state funding and Trueblood settlement, we have an opportunity to expand local behavioral health services. I support using these funds to support low barrier, harm reduction treatment
models for substance use, piloting medically assisted treatment for methamphetamine use, and more beds in permanent supportive housing for those with serious mental health problems. I support funding abortion for the pregnant people who cannot afford it, currently covered by abortion funds like NWAAF, much like is being done in New York City. I believe the city should include doula coverage in its health care, which helps improve outcomes for mothers and babies in childbirth and reduce the risk of complications, especially for black women.

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?

I am currently working with leaders from the Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network to ensure my platform aligns with their work. As a councilmember, I would turn to leaders and organizations currently working in these communities who are trusted, such as Casa Latina, Entre Hermanos, El Centro, ACRS, Fair Work Center, NWIRP, etc, to support their work and connect them to needed resources. I support building coalitions to decide policy, bringing in voices of immigrant and refugee communities early and working with other councilmembers to do the same. We must lead by example as a city, and ensure any collaboration with ICE is dealt with swiftly and severely. Follow the leadership of community leaders already working on this. Here are a few specific proposals: Working with local law enforcement to ensure that there is community outreach to develop trust so that members of the immigrant and refugee community feel they can access law enforcement in times of crisis. This can focus on supportive services for survivors of domestic violence or hate crimes, programs for youth, or other programs to build up the community. I support the Census Outreach work being done
as a collaboration between the city and community orgs to make sure we have census participation, in light of the continued legal battles and attempts to insert a citizenship question. Expanding legal outreach so that whether it be the naturalization process, asylum process, or other immigration law concerns, communities are brought into legal services. The city can do this by expanding support for the work of organizations like Colectiva Legal by providing additional grants for reduced legal bills for folks not ‘at risk’ -- as current city policy is only to provide legal defense network services for immigrants in detention, facing deportation, or at risk because of your immigration status. If people were brought in at times other than when under threat, it would build relationships and trust over time.

7. Over half Seattleites 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?

Yes, I support expanding just cause protections for renters with fixed term leases. Additionally, the doctoral research of sociologist Dr. Tim Thomas (UW) laid bare the racial disparities in eviction rates in our community. His work showed that 1 in 11 black residents experienced eviction in the Seattle area since 2004. Recent legislation has lengthened the notice period, but evictions still occur. The new legislation allows judges to consider mitigating circumstances when tenants fall behind on rent, however, most tenants lose these cases due to failure to show up. Seattle needs to provide legal support to tenants facing eviction and guaranteed right to an attorney. We need rent stabilization policies so that rents don’t rise year-to-year at rates far above inflation. We need to pass policies to change applications to prevent people from being punished for past evictions when looking for a new place to live and reconsider first/last/deposit
maximum guidelines to help folks afford a new home and prevent entering homelessness when they do face eviction.

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?

1. I support taxing large businesses in Seattle. I have proposed a “pay inequality” tax, that scales with high executive pay. One challenge with the head tax was the ability for big business to out-organize those supporting a progressive tax. In order to defeat this, we’ll need really strong messaging, and I believe that a tax that is scaled to tax companies that have unethical pay disparities will allow us to raise revenue for homelessness response while also retaining popular support of folks who were ambivalent or convinced to oppose the head tax. 2. I support a regional expansion of the housing levy. Additionally, I support the plans in discussion that create a regional (tri-county) response that enables increased bonding capacity to support and coordinate the homelessness response regionwide. 3. At the state level, it is essential that we fight
for a state income tax to finally right our deeply regressive tax structure and fully fund behavioral health services and housing.

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 have a childcare platform that seeks to address our childcare affordability crisis while protecting workers, who are predominantly womxn of color and immigrant womxn. I’m going to copy/paste our childcare platform below. We built this program by talking to working families, childcare workers, and leadership from the Imagine Institute. Reduce Barriers and Costs for Childcare Owners - Allow childcare centers, libraries, and corner stores on the same block in all residential zones - Exempt childcare centers with good transit access from employee parking regulations - Simplify permitting process and reduce permit costs for new childcare facility owners - Re-examine outdoor play area requirements in context of a more urbanized environment Require Large Businesses to Pay Their Fair Share - Require large businesses to fund a number of slots scaled to their number of employees - This policy will increase the amount of affordable childcare available for low-wage workers and help employees of each business get priority access to a set percentage of slots - This also provides “slot stability” for childcare providers by stabilizing their revenue and, thus, stabilizing hiring. Support Childcare Workers - Close the racial- and gender- pay gap by protecting caregiving careers, like childcare, which are disproportionately jobs held by womxn of color and immigrant womxn. - Support worker-led training programs, like the Imagine Institute, which provide multi-lingual certifications to help workers keep up with professional certifications in a supportive, professional environment - Fund expansion of ImagineU trainee/mentor program to expand the unionized childcare workforce - Work with community colleges to expand the number of classes available in languages like Spanish and Somali so highly-skilled childcare workers can get certified to own their own childcare centers regardless of a language barrier in training.
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?

The weekend I announced my campaign, I was on a panel at the Womxn’s March entitled “Me Too, What’s Next”, presented by the YWCA Sexual Violence Center. The co-panelists, who were both survivors and advocates, and I held a space to discuss the means by which to truly protect and serve survivors, when the systems were not built for us or by us, and instead perpetuate harm, ignore, silence, and revictimize survivors who are people of color, indigenous, refugees and immigrants, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. This challenging conversation framed my approach to these questions throughout my campaign. We have proposed the following explicit mechanisms: 1. Increasing the number of victim advocates on the victim support team and provide stipends and outreach to increase the diversity of the victim support network. 2. Provide an emergency response line for domestic violence or assault that reaches non-police community officers who are unarmed and can provide on the phone support or in person deescalation. Far too often, people of color have to choose between calling for help and risking facing police violence or getting the needed help to escape abuse or rape. 3. Work with SPD and the county to increase restorative justice models of criminal justice because the attachment of our response to gender-based violence to a highly carceral system can increase trauma & survivors should be able to work with law enforcement to seek justice aligned with their emotional needs and values and respecting their trauma. 4. Work with SPD to ensure that unidentified victims are not “coded as default” to white. Work from the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) details how the crisis of missing and murdered indigenous womxn is exacerbated by the way that area police, including SPD, identify victims with an unknown race as white. This reduces the likelihood that these individuals will be identified. 5. Ensure that adequate city funds are going to social services focused on providing culturally
competent support for survivors, including the YWCA’s specialized support for women of color, services at El Centro de la Raza, the Refugee Women’s Alliance, and the Chief Seattle Club. This also must include rehousing survivors, as data from the UIHI linked the lack of stable housing to incidence of domestic violence and sexual assault for indigenous womxn. 6. Help fund an expansion trauma-informed care training for social service workers, police officers, and educators in Seattle. Seattle needs to be a true sanctuary city. We must not have any remaining contracts that fund ICE or CPB. The more we eliminate association with deportation forces, the more trust we can build in immigrant communities. The lack of trust leaves survivors with nowhere to turn, and we must actively work to fix this. This issue is incredibly important to me and one of the main reasons I decided to run. I’m interested in learning more from front-line workers about what else would support survivors and the intersection between the trauma experienced by survivors and the structural oppression and racism within our criminal justice system. I look forward to learning more from you.

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?

About 13% of adults and 22% of families with children in Seattle experience food insecurity. We need multiple approaches to ensure we have food services for equal access to adequate, culturally appropriate, healthy food. Currently most food banks are seeing an increase in need with little to no increase in funds. As with many programs, the underfunding of public education leads to other programs losing critical funds. I support assessing the programs funded by the Soda Tax to reallocate more money to healthy food programs. It is critical that we prioritize child food insecurity because food insecurity in childhood has significant long term effects. It significantly reduces the likelihood that they will move out of poverty, increases rates of drop out, and in severe cases, it affects brain development and immune system development. I support “closing the gap” on free and reduced lunch in Seattle by ensuring the city/school district partner to provide meals on weekends, holiday breaks, summer, and during weather emergencies. Currently the “Summer Meals” program often just provides lunch and a
snack, with many locations only open for a small part of the summer. We need to apply for USDA grants, push for expanded state funding, and identify funding in the budget to expand this program to meet the full summer needs of our students and to provide those critical meals on weekends/holidays. If kids are coming to school hungry and not getting fed on breaks, it does not matter what additional programs we provide. These resources are critical. Along this same line, I support expanding programs to teen service and outreach program in the summer that engage with gardening and meal preparation. The YMCA has a teen gardening program in Bothell which used to also be run at the Accelerator YMCA in Beacon Hill, and food banks in other cities host teen cooking classes that allow people to bring in recipes from their family and culture, get access to the ingredients, bring home food, and also cook and learn in a group. Because the soda tax money is tied to this intersection between education/youth programs and food security and families are more likely to be food insecure, we have a lot of opportunity to expand programming in these ways. We can also look into recruiting programs like Food Corps, which is based in our neighbor state, Oregon, but does not serve Seattle, despite our high levels of family food insecurity. Food Corps provides culturally competent food education in high need schools. They work with students to plant gardens, cook, and learn about healthy food and their peers’ cultural foods. It also provides Americorps jobs. I support connecting folks with food resources and mailing addresses like at University Food Bank, ensuring access to voting for people experiencing homelessness. As we work to find more money to address homelessness, this is also going to require connecting people experiencing homelessness to food resources and ensuring SNAP enrollment and services are accessible to folks without permanent addresses and access to financial institutions. We have access to a lot of new data from the 2019 Health Food Availability Report, which was funded by the Soda Tax, and I look forward to using this data as a tool to really address the gaps in funding, identify and ameliorate food deserts, and fully meet the needs of those experiencing hunger and food insecurity.

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?

There is significant data that if we address hate crimes through a public health approach, we have the ability to make a much longer term impact on reducing intolerance and violence against marginalized people. First, we must adopt a victim-centered approach. We must work with affected communities to ensure there are safe-reporting methods, trauma-informed counselors, and more. We must also be sure to hire, whether in our council offices or other city positions, people who reflect the communities they serve. This increases the chance that a victim will be heard, feel safe, and be able to trust the institution. We can work with local tech companies and social norms researchers to assess means to use marketing and public awareness campaigns to reduce incidents of hate crimes. The City of London and the Home Office of the UK has taken this on and we can learn from their work. There are also more interactive approaches which can be deployed in a targeted manner online to populations at risk of developing far-right, racist, and hateful views. Motivational interviewing, which can be used to combat tobacco use in young adults or other public health problems, could be applied to teens and young adults that are often diverted into these far-right view points and become at risk for hateful violence. We should work with researchers at places like UW and in social change marketing agencies to study the possibility of using targeted interactive marketing with a motivational interviewing approach to divert and prevent the spread of hateful attitudes. Support the formation of a city anti-hate coalition. This should be led by groups within communities of color and the LGBTQIA community, but consist of allies -- from religious groups, to groups like CARW, willing to put themselves on the line to protect vulnerable people. The city should support such a coalition by providing space, bail money and legal support if needed, and trainings so that they can effectively show up to defend at-risk communities when group like Proud Boys or Identity Evropa demonstrates publicly in our city or in other similar situations. My union has developed a evidence-based, peer-led anti-harassment training and a bystander intervention training which has been crucial to creating the cultural change in our UW community. I have helped lead this training with the larger labor community in King County with great success. These types of trainings, that create systemic, cultural change must replace the current status-quo “legal limit” trainings which have been shown to increase harassment and discrimination. I support bringing this type of
approach to all city employees in order to create systemic change and gives folks the training to interrupt toxic behavior. I’m open to learning more about this issue and believe its critical that the city do its part to serve and protect the most vulnerable in this national climate of hate.

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 consider the district role to be important for constituent services. I’m committed to having in-district office hours and providing more support for equitable community input. However, I do not think that district representation should mean that councilmembers focus only on bringing services to their district. First of all, nearly 50% of the city are renters, who must move from district-to-district as affordability or their family’s needs change. Secondly, as mentioned, social services must be provided where the need is and we must support and work with providers city wide. Finally, in representing a district that has a higher population of wealthy and white people than other districts in the city, there will be times when I will advocate for resources to move elsewhere to promote racial and economic equity. I intend to do deep outreach within my district, to understand the social service providers, public housing infrastructure, etc within my district so I can be a resource to fellow councilmembers on their behalf. However, as mentioned above, I will balance the needs for citywide legislation and for equitable allocation of resources in using my leadership to provide for the needs of the city as a whole.

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?
Yes. The lack of annual inflation adjustment for the city’s human services contracts leaves a gap in the budget for providers leaving them to protect and serve our city’s most vulnerable with less. I support Council Bill 119542 and support the MLK Labor Resolution to support the inflation adjustment tied to CPI-W.