What is your name?
Jason Williams

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?

It is dire - across a range of issue areas, including homelessness, affordability, health care, nutrition, and much more.

3. What has afforded you the privilege and power to run for office, and how will it impact your role in this position?
I am a white male raised by two parents with steady, union-paying jobs. Neither of my parents knew how to navigate the college application process; I am lucky that my older sister paved the way. I graduated from college, got a good referral for a job in management consulting, then later earned my MBA at Yale. I now work at Microsoft. All to say, I have been incredibly fortunate and want to share my power and privilege with those who need the most help. That's why the city must put equity at the center of everything it does.

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?

I have done this through a variety of projects in management consulting, as well as through my membership in the The Consortium for Graduate Study in Management, the
nation's largest nonprofit dedicated to advancing racial equity in management. Look to The Roadmap Project, The Puyallup Watershed Initiative, and other collective impact groups as exemplars of purposefully putting community voices at the center of decision making. I believe those most impacted by policies should have a leading role in shaping those policies.

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?

The difference between paying rent or not could be the cost of a healthcare bill. We can and should do more to ensure our local population is healthy and productive. When my wife and I lived in San Francisco, my wife's salary was low enough that she was considered working poor. As a result, she was eligible (and received) funds from the city for a publicly-funded medical reimbursement account. By the time we left the city, she had thousands of dollars in that account. Fortunately she never had to use the funds because she was healthy. But I've always thought that program does a good job to provide a safety net for the people who need it most. I would be open to this policy, and others, to address pressing healthcare needs of Seattle residents.

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?

Here, culture and symbols matter. I would make it clear that the city will protect -- and celebrate -- immigrants and refugees. We all benefit when our newest neighbors are warmly welcomed into the city. While I do not have all of the answers for how I would leverage local systems and resources, I will prioritize this issue and commit to enlisting local immigrant and refugee organizations to create culturally relevant policies.

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?

As a renter, I know that we can do more to give renters stability and to protect renters' rights. I hear all the time from renters that -- more than anything else, even the cost of rent -- long-term stability is what is most desired. Simply put, renters want more time to plan for changes to their finances. That's why I would be open to incentives for long-term lease terms, including 5+yr leases, as a way to help renters with long-term planning. As homelessness is still first and foremost an economic problem, we should also do everything we can to help at-risk households stay in their homes. That could include rent relief, but it could also include programs that we offer jointly with landlords.
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?

As the McKinsey report shows, it is likely that we need significant funding to address the homelessness and affordability crises. This could come from levies or some other means. However, I fear that the city does not have the trust from taxpayers to ask for significantly more revenue. We need to restore trust first. I think the framing of 'housing affordability' is too narrow and does an injustice to the broader economic challenges faced by households. The difference between paying rent or not could also include the cost of healthcare, childcare, transit, and much more. There are ways to bring down the cost of rent by changing policies to allow single room occupancy units. I hear all the time from working people that SROs would be more dignified than commuting two hours both ways for work. We need more housing options at the $750-900/mo range, which will require units with small footprints. Finally, we could partner with employers to dramatically expand workforce housing. On another note, research shows that Diversion can be a cost-effective way to keep or get people housed.
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 think we need to offer affordable childcare for our working families. I've recently learned that 26% of all college students are parents. We can make it easier for parents to help themselves -- and their kids -- get ahead, by defraying the cost of childcare. I would be open to a publicly funded reimbursement account for childcare.

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?

We need to call gender-based violence what it is -- a hate crime. A disproportionate amount of homeless youth identify as LGBTQIA+. We can do more to provide funding and support through schools, family mediation, and more, to build a culture of inclusion in our communities. We should also employ an equity lens when we look at our criminal justice system. The city should hire staff that looks like the communities it serves, have staff participate in unconscious bias training, and be willing to black-list any contractor / agency that is found to have credible discrimination complaints.

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?

This is very important to my constituents, especially those in Belltown, Downtown, and Pioneer Square. We cannot let anyone go hungry. Again, we need to do everything we can to ensure that our population is healthy. I suspect there are improvements we can make to expand and strengthen sourcing from local restaurants; ensure that a greater share of food is fresh; and, partner with community groups and local faith institutions to help with outreach and provide advice on culturally appropriate options.

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?

We have to do what we can on the local level to improve civility and create a culture of diversity and inclusion. We should also hold perpetrators of hate crimes accountable for their actions. It is not okay to demean another human being or otherwise treat someone in a way that does not reflect his/her/their human dignity. I am eager to partner with Equal Rights Washington, and other experts in this space, to find culturally relevant solutions to reverse this troubling trend.

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?

We all benefit when our entire city -- and region -- is healthy and 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?

While we need to support our human service workers, an automatic across-the-board cost of living increase is not a prudent policy. There has to be some element of accountability to performance / outcomes. If outcomes are not achieved, it is not right to automatically increase contract spending. We need to optimize our resources to achieve the most impact for those in need.