SHSC 2019 online candidate survey questions

What is your name?
Jon Lisbin

1. For which position are you running?

Seattle City Council District 6

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

Homelessness has quadrupled in Ballard alone in the past year. With this increase in homelessness comes an increased need for human services, like food, shelter, job training, and so much more. It is impossible to walk around Ballard, Fremont, Phinney Ridge, and the other neighborhoods in my district without seeing people without homes. Currently, the City sweeps them from spot to spot without offering them an adequate place to stay. If we view homelessness at its most basic, it is the lack of housing. Then, following that logic, the solution to homelessness is providing housing. I support a Housing First model to end homelessness. I also believe the Council must act incrementally in Seattle to build public trust. To start, we must give homeless individuals legal spaces to tent and camp and provide wrap-around services. We also must increase support for programs that are working, like 24/7 enhanced shelters and tiny home villages. Once we build public trust, we can move on to bigger projects like Tiny Villages to solve homelessness in our city.

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

It would be remiss to not mention my inherent privileges: I am a cisgender, white, heterosexual, able-bodied male. These factors were out of my control but afforded me more privilege and power than I would have had without them. Additionally, I am in the
upper middle class. I was able to sell my business to focus on the race full-time. I recognize these factors as the reason I have a voice in this race. My whole platform is about listening to the residents of my district and I want to be the representation for those who are not afforded the same privilege I have. I have the time to investigate issues of inequity thoroughly and respond appropriately.

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?

The greatest purpose of my community activism group (Seattle Fair Growth) is to listen to and amplify community voices. We felt like City Hall wasn’t listening to us and that they did not do enough to protect vulnerable communities through policy. It’s why I’m running for City Council in the first place; we need members who care about the concerns of their residents. I’m out doorbelling almost every single day. The question I always start with is, “What do you think the Council could do a better job at?” The answers range from fixing bad patches on specific roads to reading philosophical texts, but the most common answers I get are solving homelessness, making housing more affordable, and ensuring safety from crime. These three are all interrelated results of mismanaged growth. I have been informed by my conversations on doorsteps every day and I’m still learning about these nuanced issues. If I’m not listening to the concerns of the residents I hope to serve and basing my policy agenda on those conversations, I cannot represent them.

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 most vulnerable Seattlites are those without homes. We first must provide basic health services to our homeless population - through proven strategies like free immunization clinics. We could also expand some of the programs King County has for people experiencing homelessness to cover non-homeless individuals. King County-sponsored programs like mobile medical and dental care vans could be replicated on a citywide scale for people who simply cannot afford medical and/or dental care, even if they’re in homes. Eating healthy is also an important factor in preventing illness and low income populations are disproportionately affected by our regressive tax system that leaves them less disposable income to pay for healthy food products. It’s equally important to prevent illnesses as it is to treat them and I will be lobbying the state for a state income tax.

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?

First of all, this issue is not only impacting immigrants and refugees directly but other members of our community. Seattle and District 6 is facing an increase in crime and the last thing we want is someone to fail to report crimes because they fear that they will be deported. We must do everything we can to ensure that immigrants and refugees feel safe in our community without fear of custody or deportation and I will use that conviction regarding any legislative tools that are available on a local basis.
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?

I support the efforts of the Tenants Union regarding just cause protections and I would consider expanding just cause convictions on a case by case basis. We must strike a fair balance between renters and landlords. Without just cause protection renters can unnecessarily face eviction and potentially homelessness which is not only heartbreaking for those individuals but a huge expense to society. On the other hand we must protect well-meaning landlords from abuse, particularly small mom-and-pop landlords who need enough margin to maintain the properties they manage.

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 I mentioned before, homelessness in Ballard has increased four times over in a year. I think it is high time the Council works to address this crisis. Although I strongly support a housing first approach to tackle homelessness, I do not believe Seattle can solve this issue by building homes alone. We must work with King County in a coordinated fashion to respond to the crisis we are currently facing. I support the city and King County’s recent decision to form a new entity with shared funding and accountability to lead the homeless response. We must help people who are on the brink of homelessness remain housed, whether that’s through housing vouchers, shallow subsidies, job security, reuniting with family, drug or alcohol treatment, mental health services, or help with relocation. Everyone is unique, so it’s important to take an individualized approach to address the many causes of homelessness. Regarding revenue options, I think it’s critically important that the city funds low and very low income housing directly. The state just granted Washington cities the right to retain a portion of the sales tax collected if used towards low income housing. The city can re-enact the Growth Related Housing Fund which allocated a portion of the increase in property taxes towards low income housing and utilize a portion of Real Estate Excise Taxes. These revenue streams are bondable. Additionally, the city should and can work harder to encourage philanthropy from our major employers. I believe we must work much more cooperatively and punitive measures, as we have seen, are difficult to enact and may backfire. Finally, I would like the city to show proof of concept before we ask taxpayers for more funds and as an entrepreneur I will bring that spirit to the council that is woefully missing.

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?
While doorbelling families’ homes, I’ve heard that many struggle to access affordable, high-quality childcare. First, we must encourage large employers to offer on-site subsidized childcare to their employees, reducing the parents’ commute and ensuring their children are well taken care of. For those who do not work for large companies, the City of Seattle should subsidize childcare. I believe we should first find areas in the budget that are leading to waste. If we need more money to help families out, then we should increase taxes to support this.

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?

According to the City’s webpage on Human Services, the Mayor’s Office on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (MODVSA) “invests over $443,000 annually in prevention and outreach education efforts for in-school and in-community programs, with the focus on youth and marginalized populations.” We should also increase funding for women’s shelters, specifically ones that are not religiously affiliated. Moreover, we must work to legislatively differentiate between sex workers and sex trafficking, creating support for the former and an end to the latter. Although our purview on sex work is limited, we can and should work toward an acceptance of the practice. Better police-community partnerships and bias training are essential to reducing and eliminating structural oppression and racism. Additionally, pay transparency has been effected to great success in some small businesses. When employees can see their colleague’s wages, they can analyze their company’s pay structure for racial and other prejudicial differences. The Council should encourage businesses to utilize pay transparency, possible even enacting policy to this effect.
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?

The City could require businesses that sell or serve food donate all eligible items, rather than disposing of them. The City should implement a public workforce, similar to utilities like garbage disposal, to collect excess food and distribute it to local food banks as needed. By centralizing this process, Seattle can be more efficient with donated food. Seattle must invest more in making healthy choices affordable. While food deserts are not a major issue in the city, healthy food must be affordable in addition to being local. For low-income individuals, the government could subsidize healthy options, like fresh produce, to offset the costs of healthy food. Right now, the city penalizes unhealthy options through legislation like the Sweetened Beverage Tax, but does not do enough to promote healthy choices.

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 should create a system to report and track bias incidents, not just crimes, to geographically categorize areas that are predisposed to hate crimes and make law enforcement agents aware of these areas.

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 think the most important aspect of working on the Council is collaboration. I believe the district representation model is more effective than the previous model. This is because the Council works as one team while representing different districts, ensuring all residents have someone to fight for the issues that affect them. By listening to other Councilmembers on the issues that affect their constituents, I feel we can represent the whole city more equitably. Therefore, I personally will not represent Seattle as a whole, but as a part of the Council, I will. Additionally, there are two citywide members who work specifically to address the concerns of the city at large in the current model.

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.