



Homeless Voices for Justice Candidate Questionnaire 2021
Answer from Brandon Mazer
Candidate for Portland City Council At-Large

Introduction: Can you tell us why you are running for City Council and what you will do, if elected, to address homelessness in our city?

One of the most critical issues facing the City over the next 3-5 years is affordability. I decided to run to help bring my experience from the Planning Board to the Council. As I have served on the Planning Board, I have seen first hand what is working (and not working) to bring affordable housing to the City, to increase and improve our public transit systems, and the pressures certain neighborhoods have had put on them with development. I believe my experience in these areas can be an asset to the Council as we try to develop additional policies that will increase our housing and help address homelessness in our city.

Shelter Referendum: Portlanders will vote this November on whether they want to cap the size of homeless shelters. What is your position on the Shelter Referendum question and why?

I am against Question A and will be voting for Question C in support of the facility in Riverside that the Planning Board approved last month. The reality is, we need expanded shelter capacity and a vote to block the Riverside shelter is a vote to block the only shelter that is ready to come online. In other words, a vote against the one shelter that's ready to go really means no shelters -- and that's absolutely unacceptable. In addition, a central facility with wrap-around services is a much better option than what is currently being provided at the Oxford Street shelter. The City has been working on this plan for over 5 years. When I first joined the Planning Board in 2017, one of the first issues we took up was looking at where emergency shelters could be located across the City. We grappled with the zoning and where it made the most sense for a shelter to be placed, and it was a decision that much time and thought went into.

As I mentioned above, Oxford Street is failing and we need to help address the problem as soon as practicable. This approved plan includes wrap-around services, so individuals experiencing homelessness do not need to leave the shelter to get basic health care, social services, job services, etc. The City included in their management plan the many service providers that would be on site. Additionally, the approved shelter will be open 24/7 with much needed day space (something that the Question A removes). The Shelter will also be providing a 24/7 shuttle as needed. While there is a bus stop close by, it is not expected that it will lead to a significant increase since there is a shuttle that will be provided by the Shelter to help individuals get to appointments, jobs, etc.

Another important point that is often overlooked is that this is an "emergency" shelter. As I am sure you are aware, the City actually does have smaller population specific shelters across the City and there is nothing preventing additional smaller shelters from being built. For example, we have family shelters, women shelters, domestic abuse shelters, and many sober houses. Again, my biggest fear with Question A is that it really means no shelters. While smaller shelters sound good, we don't have a plan for 4-5 smaller shelters, we don't have locations, and we don't



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have staffing to handle that number of facilities. It has taken us many years to get to this point and I don't believe we have the time to start over.

Low Income Housing: Before and during the COVID19 crisis, we have seen rents skyrocket in Portland, which is pushing more and more people into homelessness. What would you do to combat the housing crisis in Portland and how would you make housing more accessible for low-income Portlanders?

We need to start incentivizing more density along our core transit corridors, such as Forest Avenue and Brighton Avenue. We also need to help support more family housing being built. We have a number of studio and one-bedroom apartments being built, but we are seeing only a very little being built for families.

Property taxes are also a critical consideration when evaluating the affordability of Portland. Many people just received huge increases due to the revaluation. We cannot let homeowners be caught off guard again in the future and must ensure increases, while inevitable, are done slowly and responsibly. I would also like to work with our State delegation to explore amending State law to allow Portland to have a local option lodging tax that would be borne by the tourists staying in our hotels. The money paid would then stay in Portland rather than having to be part of the revenue sharing program with the entire state.

The City Council should also work with both renters and landlords to help ensure people can remain in their homes, especially while the pandemic is still active. The City should use as many means as they have at their disposal to help support tenants such as expanding rental assistance or delaying property tax payments from landlords who aid their tenants.

COVID19 & Shelter: Right now, Portland is sheltering hundreds of families and individuals experiencing homelessness, including many asylum seekers, in hotels throughout the Greater Portland area. The federal funding that pays for those hotel rooms is scheduled to end on December 31, 2021. What is your plan to provide shelter for these people once this funding goes away?

The City will need to work with our colleagues at both the State and Federal level to help expand shelter options for these individuals. We need to start having these conversations now so that we have an adequate plan in place before the deadline ends December 31. While Portland can be a leader in assisting people experiencing homelessness and asylum seekers, it cannot do it alone. I am also hopeful that the Preble Street shelter that was approved last January, will be up and running in the near future which will add 40 additional shelter beds to our community.



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Racial Equity: We know that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color experience homelessness and poverty at disproportionate rates, including here in Portland. Where do you see systemic racism in our city government or city services? How do you plan to incorporate racial equity, access, and inclusion in your policy making as a City Councilor?

The Racial Equity Steering Committee put in many hours identifying and addressing areas of systemic racism in our city government and service. I think one of the first steps the City Council can take is to implement the recommendations made by that Committee in their April 2021 report. I highly respect the important work that this Committee did and we should not just let this report sit on a shelf. Some of the specific recommendations that I personally support are revamping the police oversight committee, including racial equity training and department assessments, and implementing an alternative crisis response model.

Inclusion: How do you plan to incorporate unhoused people and people in poverty into your decision-making as a City Councilor?

We need to recognize that many of our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness and people in poverty do not have the time or means necessary to be civically involved -- and the city always benefits from more engagement from people with valuable perspectives. As an at-large councilor, my goal would be to be a voice for all of Portland and have as much outreach to these communities as possible. Additionally, I would want to have open communication to the service providers that are working with these individuals on a day to day basis to ensure the key issues are heard as the Council deliberates on different topics.

Shelter Access: If you are elected to City Council will you work and vote to uphold the city of Portland's long standing (35 year) commitment to provide emergency shelter to every person in our city who needs it?

We must be an open and welcoming City for all. Our commitment to provide emergency shelter should continue as we have done for many years.