



Homeless Voices for Justice Candidate Questionnaire 2021
Answer from Sarah Michniewicz
Candidate for Portland City Council District 1

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?

I'm running for City council because the City needs balanced, non-partisan people to collaborate on practical solutions to problems, and I have the right experience. Living in Bayside I think every day about homelessness and how we as a City can do a better job of providing shelter and services.

I've gotten practical results - outdoor bathrooms, storage, a switch to 24-hour operations, and safer LED street lighting at the Oxford Street shelter.

If elected I'll continue implementing practical solutions and developing policies that support a modern homeless services center, public health programs, diversion and prevention, and a wide variety of housing options. I'll also advocate for greater regional and State involvement, and funding for agencies and programs that align with the City's goals and values.

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 oppose Option A of the citizen's shelter referendum, as do the vast majority of shelter providers in Portland.

Option A wrongly characterizes Portland's need as for either small shelters or a large homeless services center. Both have a role to play. Portland has multiple small specialty shelters, all on the peninsula, but not a modern, efficient and effective center with all services on site and space for staff and clients to meet.

Option A would make shelters less effective and safe by eliminating safety measures, day space, and transportation requirements. Shelters would only need space for "basic shelter operations," which is what we have now at Oxford Street, and it doesn't work.

Option A maintains the status quo. Portland can do better than that.

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?

Portland must use a wide variety of tools to address the affordable housing shortage, including re-zoning to allow greater housing density and mixed-use developments along the off peninsula transportation corridors, incentivizing affordable housing development, leveraging City-owned



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land, enforcing the cap on unhosted short-term rentals, rehabilitating existing housing, strengthening the Housing Trust Fund, and supporting regional solutions to affordable housing and homelessness.

In my own neighborhood I've advocated for senior housing with units for people exiting homelessness, market rate housing, preserving existing affordable housing stock, and opposed the conversion of market-rate housing to luxury condos. I've supported improving infrastructure and transportation so people can access housing and amenities without needing a car, and as District 1 City Councilor I'll continue that work for the entire city.

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?

As far as I know the City is now able to use Emergency Rental Assistance funds to pay for the hotel rooms, so people will not need to leave the hotels at the end of the year. The ERA funds can be used for up to 18 months. This will allow the use of hotels to continue while the City and community partners work to find permanent housing placements over the next year and a half. There is also \$250 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding available, of which \$200 million remains. It will be important to consider housing outside the Greater Portland area in order to maximize the available dollars and ensure as many families and individuals as possible are securely housed.

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 most blatant example of systemic racism is the City's segregation of people experiencing homelessness into the poorest neighborhood in the City.

For over 30 years the City and social service agencies have chosen to put almost all homeless shelters and services into Bayside, where over 54% of the residents are people of color and 75% are themselves in poverty. Bayside has brownfields, almost no green space, and a pathetic 3% tree canopy, the lowest in the City.

As District 1 City Councilor I'll look at all decisions through the lens of what's fair and just for all people experiencing homelessness, and continue supporting Portland's poor neighborhoods by pushing for infrastructure improvements, trees, green spaces, playgrounds, and attention to public health and safety.



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

Because of my experience living in community with shelters and the people who need them, I can't help but bring the perspective of people experiencing homelessness with me. I will continue to solicit feedback both through social service providers, advocates, and directly speaking to unhoused people. The use of Zoom in public meetings now allows people to speak directly to the council, who might otherwise not have, and I would work to ensure that access remains available when the council eventually transitions to in-person meetings, to ensure these often marginalized voices continue to be heard.

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?

The State of Maine requires that Portland, like all towns and cities, use General Assistance funds to respond to people presenting as homeless, so even if shelter capacity has been reached, Portland will provide shelter to all who need it. Portland can't continue to do so alone however, and the City should continue to push other municipalities to fulfill their own General Assistance obligation to shelter anyone who asks for help. Portland must also stay at the front of the statewide homeless system redesign effort and support development of regional service hubs across the state to help ensure people are able to find help in their own communities.