



## Homeless Voices for Justice Candidate Questionnaire 2021

Answer from Victoria Pelletier

Candidate for Portland City Council District 2

### **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 I think it's really important for our elected leaders to reflect the issues of Portland we're trying to solve, from affordable housing, to health inequities, to lack of resources for marginalized, working class individuals. The newspaper keeps calling me a 'political newcomer' and while they're not wrong, I am someone who has qualifications working in local government, while also being a local grassroots advocate that advances engagement and leadership WITH the community, versus leading with a corporate, single-minded best interest. It's important to me that we expand the narrative around lived experience and prioritize it over a corporate resume, and I look forward to not only continuing to lead community conversations around housing insecurity, but to bring unhoused folks to the table of these conversations so that we can move forward under their leadership.

### **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?**

It's important for me to first point out the privilege and class issue we have surrounding the shelter conversation – we have folks who have always held power sitting at the table making decisions for those who are unhoused and marginalized, and they have the benefit of being able to go home to the comfort of their homes after they've decided what's best for a community they don't identify with.

Regarding the referendum, I am pro smaller shelters. I think it's important to recognize that being unhoused is not a one-district problem, and moving our unhoused community off-peninsula to Riverside so that they're out of sight/mind for tourists feels like we are pushing a narrative of erasure to the vulnerable Portlanders we claim to support. If we're not prioritizing resources and services in all of our districts so that we have a wide variety of options for our unhoused folks, we're taking the first step towards making Portland an equitable city and getting rid of the NIMBY mentality from some of our upper class residents. As Maine's largest city, Portland should be a leader in advocating for all vulnerable identities.

### **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 a full comprehensive review of our city zoning laws, which work to prohibit affordable housing. The current single-family zoning we have in place in Portland promotes city-wide segregation and makes housing less affordable for all. We have a wonderfully diverse district



**Homeless Voices for Justice Candidate Questionnaire 2021**  
**Answer from Victoria Pelletier**  
**Candidate for Portland City Council District 2**

filled with low to moderate-income, working-class individuals like myself, and if we're not discussing zoning laws, Airbnb's, and other short-term rentals, we're just upholding systemic barriers and actively driving our young people out of the city because they can't afford to live here. We need young people in Portland, and if we don't invest and prioritize their quality of life over appealing to tourists, then we cannot accurately say that Portland is a city for everyone. It's important that all District 2 neighborhoods advocate for housing for all, especially those who are in higher quality living quarters, because if we can push to end exclusionary zoning laws, it's the first step towards not just saying 'housing is a human right', but advocating for it with policy.

**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?**

I think the argument continues to come back to affordable housing, along with the eradication of unoccupied short term rentals that continue to price Portlanders out. An idea of expanding shelter is to approach it from a level of housing community advocacy when it comes to Airbnbs -- if you own property and are hosting 'leisure housing' for visitors, then for every one unit you reserve for a traveler, you are also required to provide housing for an individual dealing with housing insecurity in this city.

The rules can be defined (income, property, etc.), but I think it's important to encourage those hosting AirBnB's for tourists and large chain hotels, to give back to the community by opening their space to Portland residents dealing with housing insecurity. It will not only help advance support to our unhoused and dismantle biases, but it will also put responsibility and ownership on landlords and big businesses to invest back in our community.

**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 unfortunate reality is that systemic racism is built into the framework of our democracy, and it's something that we still continue to see regularly when we begin conversations around housing (our city benefits from redlining and exclusionary zoning laws that work to keep low income folks and Black, Indigenous and People of Color in lower quality homes) health (Maine still has the worst racial disparity of COVID-19 in the country despite having the lowest percentage of non-white individuals) education (there is a stark academia disparity between Black and white students) along with access to transportation, healthcare, etc. We're also a city that uses the word 'equity' a lot, without actually advancing this notion with policy. I look forward to actually de-weaponizing that word which has been used inaccurately in white spaces,



## **Homeless Voices for Justice Candidate Questionnaire 2021**

**Answer from Victoria Pelletier**

### **Candidate for Portland City Council District 2**

and ensuring that all city council policies have a real, authentic equity lens. This means dismantling and decolonizing a lot of comfortable settings that have existed in city council for decades. It also means ensuring I'm continuing my community advocacy work to encourage more people with diverse perspectives to run for office and get involved in civic leadership. The marginalized, low income unhoused and working class are the backbone of this city, and deserve to not only be invited to the table of conversations, but respected once they get there.

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

As mentioned above, it's imperative that if we're trying to dismantle privilege and racism, we're bringing folks with diverse perspectives to the table. The most important determinant of someone's viewpoint and skills is their lived experience, and I look forward to continuing community conversations and ensuring that I am constantly fulfilling my duty as an on-the-ground community advocate. That means advocating for transparent conversations between Portlanders and elected leaders, encouraging equitable participation in public meetings, and making sure that I'm incorporating the viewpoints of those with lived experiences on issues that will determine how we proceed with policy.

#### **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?**

Yes – I think we often see that 'housing is a human right' which is now one of my least favorite sayings, because like 'equity', it's a great excuse for people with privilege to weaponize and do the bare minimum of using words over policy. The reality is, every single person in this city deserves a right to at the very least, food and shelter, and as this city continues to rise in unaffordability, we need to continue to be a city that upholds emergency shelter to all who need it.

We have a wide range of situations as to why someone would need emergency housing, and it's our duty as a city to continue to provide it. To do otherwise is performative, and I look forward to being a city councilor that continues to advance a narrative of actual community support towards our most vulnerable community members.