



Homeless Voices for Justice Candidate Questionnaire 2022

City Council – District 3

Answers from Nathaniel Ferguson

Introduction

If you were to distinguish yourself from your opponent, what are three key differences you would highlight for voters?

I would highlight the issue-focused nature of my campaign and emphasize my commitment to addressing the housing crisis, improving transportation infrastructure, and investing in community programs and spaces. I will diligently pursue a broad reform of Portland's land use and zoning code to permit additional, sorely needed housing stock. I plan to bring that same zeal to making our streets safer and more accessible to pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit users.

Housing

There are currently an estimated 1500 people seeking shelter in Maine compared to 750 seeking shelter before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Do you support the right to shelter for people experiencing homelessness?

Yes No

Comment:

I believe that everyone has a right to adequate food, shelter, and safety. It is simply unjust to allow anyone to go unsheltered when we collectively have the resources to provide a safe place to sleep for everyone who needs one.

Do you support government funding for shelters for Maine's increasing homeless population?

Yes No

Comment:

Our government is how we collectively express our values. I support government funding for shelters because I believe we should strive to ensure that no person must spend a night without shelter.

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, there were increased government restrictions on the use of public space, this has resulted in criminal enforcement against people experiencing homelessness. Would you support ordinances that decriminalize people experiencing homelessness?

Yes No

Comment:

Criminalization of homelessness is both dehumanizing and a waste of resources. Decriminalizing homelessness and redirecting resources from enforcement to support can improve lives and makes good financial sense.



Do you support allocating government funds to build more affordable homes and subsidize housing for the low-income community?

Yes No

Comment:

I support any and all action that helps alleviate our massive housing shortage. Government subsidies for deed-restricted affordable housing are useful, especially when paired with zoning reforms to allow the construction of many more housing units of all kinds, especially middle-density and mixed-use developments.

The City of Portland's campsite policy has adversely affected people experiencing homelessness. Do you support the City of Portland's campsite policy?

Yes No

Comment:

The campsite policy of the City of Portland has led to an increase in sweeps of campsites belonging to people experiencing homelessness. These sorts of sweeps are counterproductive because they disrupt the lives of those affected and do not address the underlying issue of people being unhoused.

Do you support providing legal protections for people experiencing homelessness who are subject to discrimination in housing, unemployment, and benefits?

Yes No

Comment:

It's wrong to discriminate against people experiencing homelessness, and discrimination also makes it more difficult for people to get to back on their feet.

Food Security

Do you support enacting work requirements for federal assistance programs, such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)?

Yes No

Comment:

Work requirements are expensive to administer, and also tie a person's ability to receive needed support to their economic usefulness. I believe it is morally repugnant to deny someone access to food or medical care simply because they are not working.



What is your top priority regarding food security in the City of Portland, and how do you intend to address this issue in our community?

Comment:

My top priority is to ensure that everyone in the City of Portland has access to the food they need. I think the best way to do this is to partner with community groups and organizations that have been working in this space and provide the funding and resources they need. I believe that food insecurity is a solvable problem, and it is imperative that we allocate the resources necessary to solve it.

Referendum Questions

The following questions regard the upcoming referendum questions, outlined by citizens of Portland, that have a direct impact on people experiencing homelessness and poverty. The language is direct as the information was presented to the Portland City Council.

Do you support “An Act to Regulate Short-Term Rentals and Prohibit Corporate and Absentee Operation of Short-Term Rental Properties?”

- Prohibits corporate owners and non-local operators from registering short-term rentals in the city.
- Prohibits eviction of tenants for the purpose of immediate conversion to short-term rentals.
- Prohibits affordable and workforce housing from being used as short-term rentals.
- Increase penalties for disorderly properties and violations of the city’s existing short-term rental regulations.

Yes No

Comment:

Short-term rentals are an exacerbating factor in our housing shortage. While regulating and restricting short-term rentals alone will not solve the issue, it is a useful step. I support this referendum, but to truly address our housing shortage we will need to build many more units. Up for Growth estimates the Portland area has a shortage of 7,000 housing units, which we must build our way out of.

Do you support “An Act to Reduce the Number of Short-Term Rentals (STRs) in Portland?”

- Restricts all Portland STRs to those that are owner-occupied, tenant-occupied, or located in a two-unit building occupied by the owner.
- Increases annual fee for owner-occupied STRs to \$250 and non-owner-occupied STRs to \$750 and simplifies fee structure.
- Requires notification to all residents within 500 feet of a registered STR.
- Increases penalties for violations and strengthens enforcement of violations.
- Requires logging of complaints against all STRs.
- Allows the city to revoke STR registrations.

Yes No

Comment:

I support this referendum for much the same reasons as above. We have a housing shortage in Portland, and this is a small step to address it. This will not nearly be enough on its own, and I want to see Portland become a leader in housing production to address the burdens that low housing supply puts on everyone in the community.



Do you support “An Act to Protect Tenants in Portland?”

- Ensures that tenants receive 90-day notice for lease termination and/or rent increases.
- Discourages no-cause evictions by limiting the 5% rent increase to voluntary turnovers.
- Restricts deposits to one-month rents, prohibits application fees, limits the amount of standard annual rent increases to 70% of CPI.
- Strengthens protections for tenants who exercise their rights under the existing ordinance.
- Provides greater clarity and authority to the rent board to ensure landlords receive a fair return on investment and tenant complaints receive a fair hearing.
- Sets a \$250,000 fee for condominium conversions.
- Technical changes to the original ordinance.

Yes No

Comment:

Strong tenant protections are vital for reducing displacement of the most vulnerable. However, limiting rents and then declaring that the supply shortage is fixed will create perverse incentives that enable discrimination and impede mobility. We must pair these improved protections for existing residents with investments in housing supply more broadly.

Do you support “An Act to Eliminate the Sub-Minimum Wage, Increase the Minimum Wage and Strengthen Protections for Workers?”

- Increase the minimum wage in Portland to \$18 an hour over three years and will eliminate the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers over the same three years.
- Tipped workers will receive \$18/hr. plus tips.
- Provides an \$18 an hour minimum wage for workers not currently receiving the minimum wage (taxi drivers and other ride services, personal shoppers, delivery workers, and those doing work for a unit of government).
- Creates a Department of Fair Labor Practices.

Yes No

Comment:

I believe that all workers deserve a fair wage. Tipped workers should not be reliant on the generosity of strangers, but should be fairly compensated by their employer. I also support the creation of a city Department of Fair Labor Practices to address issues that the Maine Department of Labor is unable to investigate and handle.

Do you Support “An Act to Reduce Cruise Ships in Order to Reduce Congestion and Pollution”

- Limits the number of passengers who may disembark from cruise ships to no more than 1,000 people on a given day (in total).
- This ordinance will go into effect in 2025.

Yes No

Comment:

I support the overall cap on the number of cruise ship passengers disembarking in our city, and I especially like the language in the ordinance allowing the city to recoup costs from the cruises seeking to disembark passengers here. It just makes sense to allow the city to charge ships for the use of our services.



Opioid Crisis

The Homeless Opioid User Service Engagement (H.O.U.S.E.) is an established service program to provide 50 opioid users in the State rapid access to low-barrier treatment for substance use disorder and stable housing to support their recovery. Do you support the H.O.U.S.E. program's continuance?

Yes No

Comment:

I support the Housing First model for social services. These programs have been shown to be effective and should be expanded further.

In 2021, there were 621 overdoses in the state of Maine, an increase of 26.7% from the previous year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Part of that is due to the lack of access to detox beds in hospitals and EMS. Do you support increasing the number of detox beds in these facilities?

Yes No

Comment:

We should ensure that everyone, including people using drugs, have access to proper health care. This means having enough detox beds for everyone who needs one. Unfortunately, overdose deaths are increasing, so it is necessary to increase the number of detox beds.

Do you support the decriminalization of the personal possession of drugs?

Yes No

Comment:

Criminalizing drugs is a waste of resources that could be better spent on support services. The "War on Drugs" is a failed policy that offers no solutions to our current opioid crisis. We must take the time, energy, and money spent jailing and fining people for drug use and instead use it to build a robust safety net that can provide help to those most in need.