

# HVJ Fall 2024 Voting Guide

## Portland City Council – District 1

Every election season, Homeless Voices for Justice (HVJ) creates educational voter material and visits several community locations to register people to vote. This year, we sent all candidates a series of questions and have published all of their answers here.

HVJ is a grassroots organization that works for social change with, and on behalf of, people experiencing homelessness and poverty. HVJ is led by organizers who have all experienced homelessness. The founding group in Portland has existed since 1995, and we network in other locations across Maine. Our goal is to build a coalition for, and of, people experiencing homelessness and poverty throughout Maine. We seek to empower people experiencing homelessness and poverty whose perspectives are often excluded from the development of policies and programs that impact their social and economic wellbeing. Disenfranchisement, oppression, and marginalization creates this absence. Therefore, we hope to assert ourselves and our interests in Maine politics through protest, education, positive policy change and reform.

HVJ meets every Monday morning from 9:30-11:30am and is welcoming of everyone who has experienced, or is currently experiencing, homelessness.

For more information, email [HVJ@preblestreet.org](mailto:HVJ@preblestreet.org) or call 207-899-6042 with questions.

Are you registered to vote?

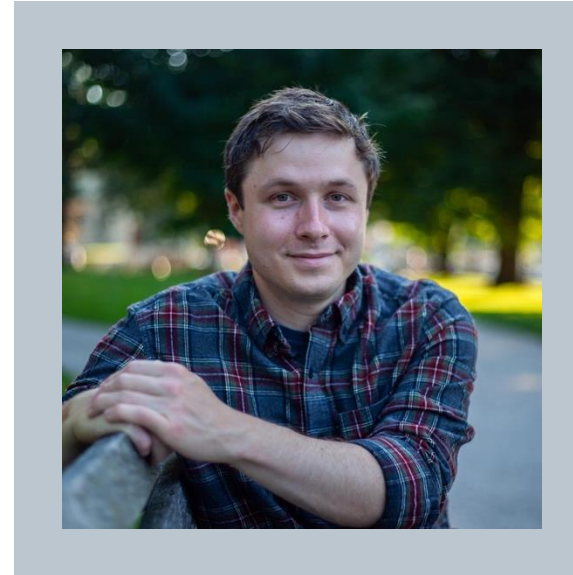
Visit [vote.org](https://vote.org) to register and see what's on your ballot



# Portland City Council – District 1



**Sarah Michniewicz**



**Robert Todd Morse**



# Sarah Michniewicz (she/her)



- Current Position:
  - President of the Bayside Neighborhood Association
  - Seamstress and designer
- Issues and Priorities:
  - Affordability
  - Sustainability
  - Livability



# Robert Todd Morse (he/him)



- Current Position:
  - President and Founder of the Urbanist Coalition of Portland
  - Member of Zoning Board of Appeals
  - Member of Portland Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
  - Software engineer
- Issues and Priorities:
  - Housing affordability
  - An accessible councilor
  - Our streets and neighborhoods
  - Homelessness
  - Climate and environment
  - 15-minute transit
  - Franklin street



# In your opinion, what are the most urgent issues facing the city of Portland?

**Sarah Michniewicz:**

"Homelessness, Housing affordability, taxes, and sustainability"

**Robert Todd Morse:**

"The most urgent issues facing the city of Portland are housing affordability, homelessness, and climate change. Housing affordability and homelessness are deeply related but we need to help people experiencing homelessness right now while we work towards long term housing affordability."



# If you were to distinguish yourself from your opponent(s) for voters, what would you highlight as three critical differences?

## **Sarah Michniewicz:**

"I've lived, worked, and volunteered in Portland for 27 years. I've lived in Bayside for 26 of those years and know the history, people and issues that matter to Portland. I have a deep understanding and commitment to the people and places across District One. When things get tough, it makes me even more determined to speak up for positive change. I've proven I'm in it for the long-haul. My life is directly touched by the issues that are most important to District One and across Portland - homelessness, affordable housing, environmental justice, fair taxes, equitable treatment by the city, safe streets and sidewalks, green spaces and trees, and more. I know what it's like to feel ignored by City Hall, and understand how the policies made there effect real people's daily lives. I've listened, learned, and deeply understand what it takes to stand up and represent. I've built the skills, knowledge and relationships needed to make change. I understand how policies are made and how to make sure regular people have a seat at the decision-maker's table. Portland's issues are complex and there are long-standing inequities that need to be faced in order to make District One a place that's healthy and accommodating for all, and I've put in the time and work to understand how to do it."

## **Robert Todd Morse:**

"My experience has been focused on policy advocacy with the goal of making housing more affordable, neighborhoods more walkable, and transit more convenient city-wide. This focus on policy prepares me well to work to solve the problems our city is facing. I have worked collaboratively with the current City Council as well as groups and individuals with diverse viewpoints. I believe in listening to people from all viewpoints and identifying areas where people agree and we can make progress. I have experience working on city boards which has given me the opportunity to work alongside city staff. This has helped me understand some of the day to day workings of city government and the work that our staff does to keep things running."



# What is your plan to address the root causes of homelessness and help people experiencing homelessness in your district find safe and stable housing?

## **Sarah Michniewicz:**

"The root causes of poverty, trauma, and systemic injustice have no single or easy solution, but the most impactful things the council can do is ensure that effective, evidence-based programs, housing, treatment and services are available, accessible, sustainably funded, and safe for all. I will work to make shelter environments a place people can truly gain the stability they need, and support strong housing navigation programs to make sure people don't fall through the cracks. I intend to evaluate the social service system to identify gaps and overlaps in service, use data to identify the approaches and programs that truly work for people experiencing homelessness, and make sure our money is going toward solutions that have long-lasting impact. I would also support a wide range of housing options, including the Work Works model, truly supportive housing models that encourage skill-building in order to ensure people retain their housing. It is also crucial to foster community support for the solutions and environments that will ensure people experiencing homelessness will be successful in their shelter, housing, and treatment. I will prioritize strategies to make services and shelters something Portlanders welcome, not fight, and set an example for regional partners on how to care for people within their own communities."

## **Robert Todd Morse:**

"I would take a three pronged approach to addressing the root causes of homelessness. First, we need to make sure that we are meeting our immediate needs. Our region must always have sufficient shelter capacity to meet the current need. This also can't be just any shelter capacity, different people experiencing homelessness have different needs and we need to ensure these needs are met. This means tracking the need for services, so we can plan for enough shelter capacity both in Portland itself and in our region. Meeting the short term need gives us space to invest in solving the root causes of homelessness. The biggest root cause of homelessness is a lack of affordable housing. We need to increase the supply of housing by updating our zoning code and building mixed income social housing. The third piece is supportive housing, or housing first projects. Some people need more assistance than just a place to live. Getting people into a stable place to live is the best first step towards providing this assistance. People can't recover if they are worried about having a place to sleep at night."



Many communities are finding success with Housing First programs, which prioritize getting people into housing quickly with supportive services. What is your position on the Housing First approach, and would you support a Housing First location in your district?

**Sarah Michniewicz:**

'Housing-first is a valuable concept, and can be successful when administered and managed effectively and safely. Many people are successful in housing first. But it cannot be "housing only." To be truly supportive, services have to be accessed, not simply accessible. When people who move directly into housing first struggle to remain successfully housed, we have to look at why, address those issues through treatment, skill-building, and other interventions. It's important for people exiting homelessness to be in locations that are safe and supportive of their housing and recovery goals, and I will advocate for housing and services in locations where people have space from the trauma and triggers they are trying to escape. Vulnerable people deserve to have options away from the places, people and things that may pull them back into situations that make it harder to remain housed and in recovery. District One is a big place, and there are many locations for housing first that can be explored.'

**Robert Todd Morse:**

"I think housing first is the best solution to address the root causes of homelessness. The only drawback is that housing first projects require a lot of time and resources to build and maintain. But that shouldn't dissuade us from doing this - we can do difficult things. I support spending that time and investing in these projects and we also need to make sure that we have shelter capacity that meets our current needs."





# Would you allow Portland residents to sleep outdoors?

## **Sarah Michniewicz:**

"No one should be without shelter, or arrested for simply sleeping outside. I support the city policy of removing barriers to shelter and helping people access available shelter beds, and thankfully 20-30 shelter beds are consistently available at the Homeless Services Center. Large encampments are very different than simply sleeping outdoors, though. They can very easily become tremendously unsafe, exposing vulnerable people to terrible violence and creating situations where people feel they have no choice but to engage in unsafe options to survive. I saw this up close as a neighbor of the Oxford Street shelter, which was the site of an encampment for most of 2022, which eventually moved to the Bayside Trail. I also support continuing to invest in novel approaches like the HOPE program which is designed to provide people who refuse shelter a more direct path to housing vouchers. Personal relationships with direct outreach professionals are the best way to solve unique barriers individuals may have to accepting available shelter. I support creating a day space so people have a safe place to connect with case workers, receive mail, work on obtaining necessary paperwork, etc."

## **Robert Todd Morse:**

"If someone is sleeping outdoors it means we have failed them. For me, the question is less about whether people should be sleeping outdoors and more about how we handle it. We need to make sure we are treating people with care and dignity. This means making sure there is coordination between the City and service providers, that we are interacting with people in a trauma-informed way, and people's belongings are kept safe. We need to be connecting people with a safe place to stay and not simply moving people around and making their situation even more difficult."



# How do you plan to address the problem of food insecurity in the city of Portland and ensure that people in your district have enough food to achieve an active, healthy lifestyle?

## **Sarah Michniewicz:**

"I support the highest priority designation of the Community Development Block Grant "food security" category to ensure food programs are adequately funded. This perspective is informed by our experience witnessing the problem of hunger in our neighborhood. I have also actively worked to continue providing a grassroots community garden in the most marginalized neighborhood, where the city has not provided direct support. I am in favor of designating a safe, sanitary location where people can receive needed food discreetly, and with dignity. While curbside food delivery serves a purpose, I believe we can better meet people's needs with a more structured program. I also strongly support efforts to ensure children's learning is not derailed by food insecurity."

## **Robert Todd Morse:**

"The Portland region has a lot of excellent resources tackling the problem of food security. My work on the Community Block Grant Allocation Committee has given me the opportunity to look at the impact of some of these programs in detail. Food security is the most basic of human needs. As a city, we should prioritize making sure programs combating food insecurity have the resources they need."



# What is your opinion on Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030? Do you agree with the governor's office's approach to this issue?

## **Sarah Michniewicz:**

"Believe we can end hunger, and the governor's roadmap lays out a pathway to doing so. The focus on developing infrastructure is particularly important. Replicating initiatives such as Preble Street's food security hub should be a priority."

## **Robert Todd Morse:**

"I believe that nobody should go hungry in the most prosperous country in human history. We need to take action at all levels of government to end the issue of hunger. I commend the State's decision to provide universal school lunch and am glad this is included in the Roadmap. I agree with the governor's approach to this issue. Like any problem, a good plan is only a first step. I will not be satisfied until everyone has access to safe, nutritious food."



# The opioid epidemic is one of the biggest public health crises in the state of Maine. What programs or initiatives would you support to address this issue within your district?

## **Sarah Michniewicz:**

"I will support access to effective and evidence-based treatment and interventions in my neighborhood and the district as a whole. I will also continue to educate myself as understandings about harm reduction, medication assisted treatment in carceral situations, and the effects of needle exchange programs continue to evolve. Other dangerous street drugs need more focused attention as well, as many have equally devastating effects and are more often than not cut with fentanyl. More than any other root cause of homelessness, I believe investing in treatment programs can make the most difference. I also support strong law enforcement response to drug trafficking, careful application of the available opioid settlement money to support prevention as well as treatment, and finding appropriate locations to site treatment the treatment facilities that we need."

## **Robert Todd Morse:**

"The opioid epidemic is unfortunately a nationwide crisis that has devastated families all over Maine and right here in Portland. We need action at all levels of government to address this crisis. In my district, I support investing in treatment programs. Opioid addiction is a medical problem and to solve it we need to use the most effective evidence-based practices to reduce the harm caused by opioids."



# How do you plan to incorporate the perspectives of people with lived experience of homelessness and poverty into your policymaking?

## **Sarah Michniewicz:**

"Living here in Bayside, as a neighbor to services and shelters, I bring that informed perspective to my thinking every day, and will continue to do so as I create policy at on the council. By continuing to live in community with people experiencing homelessness, asking questions and listening to their stories; continuing to participate on the Elena's Way advisory panel; and engaging with non-profit leaders and the unhoused people who spend time in Bayside, the path to homelessness functional zero will be the goal of every decision I make."

## **Robert Todd Morse:**

"We can never know if we are meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness and poverty if we don't listen to them directly. If elected, I would make time to listen to these voices by interacting with advocacy organizations that center those perspectives and spending time in our shelters and service centers to get a firsthand perspective."

