



Jani Hitchen Urbanist Questionnaire 2024

Pierce County Council District 6

What is your vision for how Pierce County should grow in the coming decades?

What does a livable community look like to you and how do you plan to ensure the County is doing enough to create these kinds of communities?

We must work to plan intentionally about where we grow. Pierce County has allowed growth in the unincorporated parts of our county without investing in infrastructure, so now we must densify and work to improve infrastructure, improve mobility for all modes of transportation, and make sure that people have access to basic needs closer to where they live. This can be done, but will take some changes to zoning and policy work.

Given that 446,000 people live in unincorporated Pierce County, how will you manage growth in these areas? How should the County curb sprawl and encourage urbanization and transit use in unincorporated areas of the County?

We are currently working on our Comprehensive Plan. If re-elected I will be working hard to follow through on that plan, which includes protecting green space within the urban and rural areas and densifying our urban core. In addition, working to no longer allow density in our rural areas. We need to look at ways to increase housing density and types in the areas that are closer to Tacoma, Lakewood and Puyallup, because they have the services for larger populations.



What policies would you put forth to address historic inequities and move towards a more equitable Pierce County?

I have worked hard the last 3+ years to make sure that we are doing more for those in our county that do not or have not had a voice (or have not had access) to local government in the same way some do. I voted for and supported our first ever Pride Proclamation, I have championed work around addressing domestic violence, I have prioritized lived experiences to guide decision making and supported developing an equity note, and equity index.

If re-elected I plan to stand up or Equity Review Commission if our next Executive will let it through, as this is a way to bring a lens of equity to many major decisions. For those living with disabilities I believe we can be doing more.

Another area is to make sure that as we work on increasing housing, and densifying areas that we are not "gentrifying" an area and forcing communities out of their neighborhoods. This can be incredibly complicated, but with intentional work in the community, it can be done.

How will you ensure youth are able to thrive in Pierce County, from education to transportation to access to opportunity?

As a former high school science teacher, I have worked incredibly hard to make sure that we are thinking about your youth of today and those coming in the future.

I have championed the work of our Birth to 25 Advisory Board that has allocated millions of dollars in childcare expansion, youth and young adult programming and improving places and spaces for children across the county.



I have worked with youth organizations to help find creative ways to do more for children that are struggling or tangled with the justice system, and continue to work towards intervention programming early to reduce youth violence and crime.

We can do more, and there are many partners in our county doing amazing work that just need an advocate on the Council.

What are your priorities around transportation? Do you support Pierce Transit's vision for a bus rapid transit network and if so how would you bring it about?

Safety is at the core of my priorities. Safety for those driving and for those walking or rolling. We have spent decades building up Pierce County so a person can drive as fast as possible to get from point A to point B. This has left behind the needed infrastructure for buses, bikes and pedestrians.

With more people coming, we must create a network of transit that will move people in a timely way. This means more transit lines that make those community connections and safe ways to get to those bus lines.

The Stream is a great first step, and the work the county and state are doing to improve access to this bus line with sidewalks and bike paths is wonderful, but this is only the first step. We must focus our funding priorities on moving people on transit, because we simply cannot fit more roads or lanes. Our only option is to provide more transit options for our increased population. Starting now, is key.

What does a Vision Zero campaign to end traffic deaths look like to you and what will you do to fund and achieve that?



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Our Vision Zero plan should be coming back to the Council later this year. If we truly hope to achieve zero traffic fatalities, we must work to improve the safety of all our roads. While changing driver behavior can be hard, making the safe choice, the easy choice for drivers, bikers and pedestrians is key.

Making sure that there are signs, lighted crosswalks, street lights, lower speed limits in areas of high pedestrian traffic, and built environment that forces vehicles to drive more carefully all can be done to move our county towards a goal of zero traffic fatalities.

Complete streets, where we require roads to be built with all users in mind can be done through code changes, and then we must partner with the state and federal governments, and our cities to create networks of safe paths and roads so all users can navigate safely.

How will you shift the current dynamic and challenges regarding homelessness funding between the Executive and Council?

I am currently championing the Unified Regional Approach to ending homelessness. This includes pulling all our city and town partners, and the Tribes together to think about this as a region.

My work on this came directly out of the Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness, where it states we needed a regional authority or organization to coordinate this complicated work.



Once this is established, the county as a whole can be more nimble to address needs as they change, and work to focus energy on up-stream work, as we continue to partner on projects that allow for supports at every level. The county's investments in affordable and permanent supportive housing over the next 10 years are going to be at the center of any success that we create. Shelter space is always needed, but shelter is for the emergency, not the solution. Our investment in actually building affordable units will be the only way to solve this.

What steps should the County take to expand renter protections in unincorporated Pierce County?

The county has no authority over rentals, due to state law. We could advocate for that authority with the state in years to come.

However, we do support the court systems, and have and can continue to fund non-profits to help support tenants as they navigate a complicated systems. We have funded legal services to help with tenant-landlord dispute resolution, provided help with rental supports and hope to continue to invest in more income constrained units.