



Candidate Name: **Rob Johnson**

District: 4

2015 Seattle Council Candidate Questionnaire

As a candidate for Seattle City Council, the Rental Housing Association is interested in your views on the following questions as they relate to both residents of rental housing communities, as well as the owners and managers of those communities.

Candidates must complete a questionnaire prior to an interview and consideration for RHAPAC support. Respondent questionnaires are not shared publicly by RHAPAC or its members.

1. Do you have any experience owning or managing rental housing? Yes___ No_X__
2. **Rent Control** – The Rental Housing Association recognizes that housing costs in Seattle, and the Puget Sound region, are growing at an increasing rate. Stakeholders (HALA Committee) are actively working with the City to find reasonable solutions aimed at keeping vulnerable populations housed, and ensuring current and future renters have housing options which allow them to stay in the City.

However, a vocal minority have chosen to focus their attention on rent control – softly labeled “rent stabilization” – as a solution for market-rate rental housing in Seattle. At present, rent control at the local level is prohibited by State law – RCW 35.21.830.

Would you support a Council Resolution calling for the overturn of the State rent control prohibition? Yes_X__ No___

Would you support an ordinance which would enact rent control in Seattle? Yes___ No_X__.

What are your thoughts on rent control as a solution to housing affordability?

I wouldn't support a rent control ordinance because I don't believe it would be legally enforceable. Rather than distracting people with slogans I'd prefer to focus on solutions. Rent control is one of the potential tools in our tool box, but only if we have the authority to enact it, which we currently do not. In some cities, when used too broadly, rent control has only exacerbated the housing affordability crisis. If the legislature were to give Seattle that authority (a very big long shot) then I would support rent control being one tool among a myriad of others to keep housing affordable. I think that looking for a one way / option solution to keeping low-income folks living in our city is a mistake and we have to provide housing options that work towards folks at multiple income levels. Our biggest problem with housing and gentrification is the lack of market-rate housing that is available. As neighborhoods like Ballard and Capitol Hill are significantly increasing the amount of market-rate housing, I'm curious to see the long term effects on rents in older buildings and the renter retention rates in these neighborhoods. However, allowing persistent and unpredictable increases in rent is not only morally wrong, but also bad for our economy and culture.

3. **Affordable Housing Solutions** – Many ideas are being floated by Council, the Mayor, and affordable housing advocates which seek to increase production of housing considered affordable to people earning 80% or less of adjusted median income in the City of Seattle.

Included in those are linkage fees on new development, a potential \$500 million bond to preserve and build affordable housing, zoning changes impacting the 66% of city land exclusively zoned as single-family, and modifying incentive programs available to developers who build affordable units.

What strategies and solutions to preserve and increase housing affordability in Seattle would you seek to enact as a Councilmember?

I'd like to see us significantly increase the funds in 2016's housing levy. I'd like to see us explore more housing on public lands. I'd like to see us work more closely with Sound Transit on surplus properties to build more transit oriented development that could be targeted for affordable housing. I'd like to see us increase our height limits around Sound Transit light rail stations, particularly in the University District, Roosevelt, and Northgate. I'd work to ease restrictions on building ADU and DADU's to allow for more alley and backyard developments, and I'd focus on increasing zoning heights in neighborhood commercial corridors. I'd like to see us go to Olympia and get the authority (if we don't believe we have it already) to implement a form of land value taxation to (ideally) flatten out some of our construction booms and busts to fund affordable housing. A land value taxation model would provide a more stable revenue source than the proposed linkage fee and encourage all homeowners (not just developers) to share in the responsibility of building more affordable housing. I'm a supporter of increased tent city encampments provided that they are placed near frequent transit service and that we have the social service workers available to get residents access to the services they need. And most importantly, I don't want us to build a multi-billion dollar light rail system that is extremely frequent, reliable, and affordable (especially now thanks to ORCA LIFT) that subsequently prices the working families who need that frequency, reliability, and affordability out of the city.

4. **Housing Supply** - Even as record numbers of apartment units are constructed in the City, statistics show that there is still a housing shortage. Recently, Mayor Ed Murray called for the creation of 50,000 more housing units, with 20,000 of those affordable to individuals and families earning 80% or less of AMI, over the next 10 years. If elected, what policy measures would you support and pursue to create more housing supply in Seattle?

With five new light rail stations opening up in next five years (three of which are in District 4) and the recent increase in service hours for our city's bus service, we have a huge opportunity to not only reshape our transit system, but also the housing options available to folks living around these major service areas. I'm a big supporter of the Business Improvement Area and the potential upzone / rezone (being voted on in 2016) in the University District, and as mentioned above, think we drastically need to increase height limits in similar areas of high traffic and public transit. That housing shouldn't just be market rate housing, but should include significant incentives for both affordable housing and family size housing. I'd like to see us provide more leadership for the kinds of public/private partnerships that just resulted in family size housing prioritized for faculty and staff of Seattle Childrens and UW that was just completed in the University



District. One of our biggest impediments to housing is our city’s obsession with parking spaces and their requirements included in new developments. With better functioning transit service, we can reduce the amount of cars in our city and thus the need for parking requirements. Fewer parking requirements results in reduced development costs and more affordable housing.

- 5. **Just Cause Eviction** – Under the State Landlord-Tenant Act, a rental owner may give a month-to-month tenant twenty days’ notice to vacate prior to the end of a rental period. This allows property owners to terminate tenants who are being a nuisance to others or damaging a rental unit.

Seattle, however, has a city-specific Just Cause Eviction Ordinance which prohibits an owner from terminating a month-to-month tenancy unless the rental owner can prove that "just cause" exists. The list of reasons allowed is very limited, and can take months to establish, leaving the owner and neighboring tenants in the unfair, and perhaps unsafe, position of having to tolerate a bad tenant.

Would you support amending "just cause" to allow a rental owner to terminate a tenancy where the tenant has received a City citation for violation of the noise ordinance? Yes ___ No **X**

Would you support amending "just cause" to allow a rental owner to terminate a tenancy where the tenant has received a City citation for violation of the land use code? Yes ___ No **X**

- 6. **Ex-offenders and screening of criminal records** – Dating back to 2011, Seattle Council and the Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) have considered legislative options for increasing employment and housing opportunities for ex-offenders. In 2013, legislation was passed that removed employment barriers for ex-offenders. Its rules include:

- “Ban the box” – applications cannot ask if an applicant has ever been convicted of a crime.
- Criminal History – Employers cannot ask about an applicant's criminal history until after completing an initial screening to eliminate unqualified applicants.
- Criminal Records – Employers may not reject a qualified applicant solely based on their criminal record unless they have:
 - o A "legitimate business reason" for making the employment decision;
 - o Identified to the applicant the record or information on which they are basing their employment decision;
 - o Provided the applicant a reasonable opportunity to explain or correct the information, and held the position open for a minimum of two business days after notifying the applicant, in order to give the applicant a meaningful opportunity to respond.

RHA believes it is likely that this conversation will turn to ex-offenders applying for rental housing.

Such protections extended to ex-offenders seeking rental housing could compromise rental owners’ ability to ensure the safety of other tenants, neighbors and the community.

Would you support extending the ex-offender jobs assistance legislation to cover applicants seeking rental housing?

Yes **X** No ___

Why or why not?

We should give ex-offenders the opportunity at rehabilitation. We have a huge homelessness problem in our city that we have yet to adequately recognize or address. Studies have shown that this is largely due to cycle of poverty and criminality that are usually caused by underlying social inequity in our society. With rental owners allowed employment and housing reference checks, this should be sufficient information to determine the viability of housing applicants.

- 7. **Tenants Union Funding** – The Tenants Union receives funding from the City, as well as King County, among other sources. Without such funding it would not exist.

A major portion of Tenants Union funding is used to lobby local government. Do you believe the Tenants Union should be supported with public funding?

Yes No

- 8. **Rental Housing Inspections** – In October 2012, Seattle City Council adopted legislation that mandated a rental housing inspections and registration program. Registrations and inspections have now begun, with the city’s full stock of rental housing expected to be registered by December 31, 2016.

RHA participated in a year long stakeholder process with DPD, tenant advocates, and other industry experts, which focused on the efficacy of the program and how best to measure the success of the program.

RHA believes that for this program to be efficient and effective over the long-term the stakeholders group should continue to meet and receive reports from DPD detailing the implementation of the program, its cost effectiveness as measured by benefits realized by the program, and to ensure that program results remain transparent for all interested parties.

Do you support continuing the rental housing inspections and registrations stakeholder group on an on-going basis? Yes No

Notes:

Campaign Name: **Rob for Seattle**

Address: **1037 NE 65th St. #141, Seattle, WA 98115**

Phone: **206-920-9578 (Rob’s Cell)**
253-678-2134 (Campaign Manager, Emilio Garza, cell)

Fax: N/A

Email: **rob@rob4seattle.com**