

**Ward 1 Candidates Forum:  
Discussion of the Comprehensive Plan on Development, Housing, and Land Use in DC**

**Candidate Questionnaire**

**Instructions:** Please complete this questionnaire and return to Justin Godard ([godardjm1@gmail.com](mailto:godardjm1@gmail.com)) by Friday, March 23, 2018.

**Name:**

*1) In your view, should our housing policies reflect the belief that safe, affordable housing and safe, clean shelter is a right? If so, do you think those needs are best met through public housing options and/or a private market with more government controls, or do you think it is best met through a private real estate market with fewer government regulations?*

Yes, I believe that safe, clean housing and shelter is a right for people and families of all income levels. Providing housing and shelter for those with low incomes or in great need is a moral necessity. Additionally, it is not only the moral thing to do, it is the right thing to do from an economic perspective. No one chooses to be poor or homeless, and many who have good incomes today could find themselves in need of shelter following a serious illness or loss of employment. By providing for those in need we support vibrant and diverse neighborhoods, that allow all residents to contribute and participate in our communities, to sustain the highest possible quality of life for all who live in the District of Columbia.

The private real estate market is never going to produce the amount of housing and shelter needed by residents with the lowest incomes, or no income at all. This will only be achieved through government participation whether through zoning laws, use of public resources, or through government programs. Government exists to do what no self-interested person or entity will do by itself. Government exists to fix roads, provide public education, and provide for citizens who have nowhere else to turn – and this includes housing and shelter.

*What policies will you pursue that reflect your beliefs while meeting the needs of the extremely low income, moderate income, and families regardless of their race, immigration and/or language spoken?*

Since 2013 I've been actively working to preserve and increase housing that is accessible to low- and moderate-income families. The two most significant projects I have been working on the most are getting the redevelopment of the Park Morton Public Housing complex back on track and working to redevelop the former Hebrew Home for the Aged building at 1125 Spring Rd. Both of these efforts have included using public land as part of the solution. Park Morton will preserve 147 public housing apartments, and create another 155 moderate-income apartments. The Hebrew Home will create 90 apartments for seniors at 60% AMI and below in addition to another 62 units of moderate income apartments.

I believe that when public land is part of development, the government has an opportunity and obligation to produce significant amounts of below market housing, particularly for those in the low- and moderate-income ranges. However, we can do better. We have to do better. We need to produce more three- and four-bedroom apartments to support families and look for creative opportunities to proactively produce new housing.

The two policy areas that I will focus on are:

- Looking for underperforming public land where more housing can be accommodated. An example of this would be the Third District Police Station and Engine Company No. 9 on U Street. These properties are one- to two-stories tall in an area zoned for mixed use buildings 50 ft. tall. In essence, 3 to 4 stories could be added to each of these sites by-right. We need to consider rebuilding public owned properties like these to both meet the existing needs of the police and fire departments as well as gain the additional floors of below market housing that District residents desperately need.
- Establishing a stronger commitment to building SROs could provide a last option before becoming homeless and the first transition from homelessness. Single Room Occupancy housing generally provides housing in which one or two people are housed in individual rooms or two rooms with a bathroom or half bathroom within a larger building. Having more SROs available and spread-out through the District would help stabilize at-risk individuals and families, in addition to providing support before becoming homeless. It would reduce the demand for shelters and is far more cost effective than the city's current policy of renting hotel/motel rooms when shelters have reached capacity. They could also provide the necessary social services and support that someone who is homeless needs to get a job and get back on their feet. I think we would find that this is a better and more dignified path for many than living on the streets or in a shelter.

*2) Do you believe the city's recent economic development strategies affected inequality and homelessness? And in what ways? What new economic development policies, if any, would you pursue to meet the needs of all residents making \$30,000 or less?*

The city's economic development strategies seem to have been primarily to attract new residents and grow the tax base. While this is important, it has not been without cost. The increased demand for housing at all levels has resulted in ever rising costs to live in the city. Additionally, an unanticipated result was the entrance of small developers who purchase rowhouses and single-family houses to subdivide them into two-bedroom condominiums. This further competes with families and increases the cost of housing even higher. It also removes significant opportunities for many first-time buyers to buy an affordable fixer-upper and invest sweat equity.

In response to the current housing market, I would like to explore ways to protect and preserve family sized housing, strengthen our laws and regulations to provide consumer protections to homeowners when abutting development damages their houses so that they are not displaced, and review and strengthen programs that provide first-time buyer assistance so that more low- and moderate-income families can own their home, which ultimately helps prevent displacement.

Specifically, I would like to strengthen programs like the Home Purchase Assistance (HPAP) program to ensure that the program is truly helping the low- and moderate-income residents it was designed to help. HPAP provides interest-free loans and closing cost assistance to qualified low- and moderate-income residents to purchase single family houses, condominiums, or cooperative units. While the program is focused on helping very low--to-moderate income residents, the program has also been used by upwardly mobile professionals. In my opinion, the program really should be focused on low- to moderate-income families and we should explore ways to improve reporting of incomes following a loan. The goal should not be to deny any qualified applicant from

receiving assistance, but rather to identify applicants who are working in upwardly mobile professions with increasing salaries. Within five years of receiving HPAP assistance, we should consider if those whose earnings would no longer qualify for HPAP should instead have the interest-free loan converted to a low-interest rate loan with the money reinvested in the program to continue helping fund additional very low- to moderate- income families.

*3) In your view, has the city's focus on creating more market rate housing supply fueled or reduced displacement pressure on lower income people and affordable housing stock? Are the policies in the comprehensive plan that aim to reduce displacement pressure and preserve black and/or immigrant neighborhoods from gentrification sufficient to that task, or would you take additional steps to achieve these goals?*

I don't believe that there is anything currently in the Comprehensive Plan that adequately addresses the current pressures in our city resulting in displacement. While its true that some families have left the city for other opportunities, it is equally true that some have made the hard decision to leave because they can no longer afford to live in an ever more expensive city. The city's successful growth and development over the past decades has undeniably made Washington both a desirable place to live and an expensive place to live. Not enough has been done to address the increased economic pressures that black and immigrant neighbors currently face.

I definitely think additional steps need to be explored, and the three areas I would begin with are:

- Working to establish conservation districts so that our oldest neighborhoods have more development oversight without creating undue economic hardships for low- and moderate-income homeowners who need to make home repairs;
- Strengthening and amending our homestead tax deductions for residents who are seniors or disabled. Residents on a fixed income should not be displaced by rising taxes. Additionally, seniors who do not sign up for the senior citizen homestead deduction when they qualify at age 65 should get a retroactive tax refund when they do apply; and,
- Establishing Neighborhood focused TIFs, whereby the future value of a neighborhood is leveraged to reinvest in the neighborhood. Specifically, I would like to explore using a Neighborhood TIF to establish interest free loans for low- and moderate-income families who need access to funds for significant repairs like replacing a roof or a porch on their house.

*4) In your role as councilmember, how would you use the comprehensive plan to make sure that DC is protecting its infrastructure and the environment as new development occurs?*

As I've reference above, I'd like to work with the Office of Planning to follow through on the Comprehensive Plan's goals of establishing conservation districts in the District. This is one way we could better manage our century-old neighborhoods. I also focused and submitted a number of amendments to the Comprehensive Plan as they relate to the environment, parks, and public access to green space which is unevenly distributed in the District, with wealthier neighborhoods often having better access than poorer neighborhoods.

While the Comprehensive Plan is important and outlines goals, I think the real opportunities are going to come in the form of legislation or government commitment to the goals.

For example, we can require better when we rebuild streets and roadways, and we can require more from developers and utilities. I would like to see more bioretention bulbouts as part of street projects, and find ways to improve our tree canopy for areas that currently don't have any. I've also been working closely with Councilmember Cheh's office to craft legislation to clearly define DC Water's responsibility to replace all lead water service lines in the District.

Ultimately, we need to have an accurate understanding of what state our infrastructure is currently in, and have a plan for how it can support the city's growth. We can't turn a blind eye to infrastructure as it is an integral part of a functioning, inclusive city.