

## 2024 Portland City Elections Questionnaire

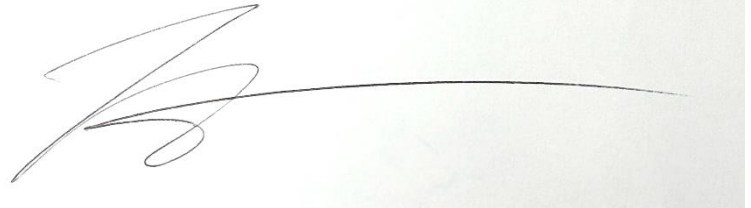
**Candidate Name:** Noah Ernst

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**Candidate Signature:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Noah Ernst', written over a light-colored background.

### 1. Do you want United for Portland's endorsement and support?

Yes. Having reviewed the United for Portland's website and having spoken with people involved, I believe I share United for Portland's goals and priorities.

### 2. What's your approach to ending unsheltered homelessness in Portland?

We need to look critically at every program being funded. Last year Portland alone spent approximately \$62,000 per homeless person. And the number appears to have been higher in previous years. What are we getting for that amount of money? Portland has more people on the streets than ever before. We need to fund programs that are actually getting homeless people off the streets and into housing and services and stop funding programs that aren't achieving those results.

Most people I talk to want to help people get back on their feet. However, they want their tax money to be spent wisely and to go to people who want help, want to get off the street, and want to get into substance abuse and mental health treatment. People hate feeling that their tax money is being spent to create full employment for homeless advocates and six figure salaries for non-profit executives, but not to solve homelessness, drug addiction, or the mental health crisis. But that's what they see. Instead of results, they see huge amounts of money being spent and advocates constantly repeating "we don't have enough resources."

I believe we need to expand designated camping areas so that homeless people are no longer camping on sidewalks in front of residences and businesses. In designated camping areas, services such as sanitation, clean water, public safety, and access to services such as substance abuse rehabilitation programs and mental health services can be provided

more efficiently and cost effectively. We need to create more temporary housing such as shelters and transitional housing as quickly as possible. We need to work with the county and state to increase access to drug and mental health treatment. I believe we need to target our limited housing resources towards people who want to get off the streets, into treatment, and into employment before providing housing to people who don't.

Let's focus the housing we have on those for whom it can do the most good. Finally, we must hold everyone who receives city money accountable to results. Every single policy and program must be critically evaluated to make sure it works. There must be no sacred cows. If it isn't achieving the outcomes we want, we need to stop doing it and do something else.

We must even question the "housing first" model. (The homelessness model adopted starting in the late 1990s by the federal government and virtually every state and major city.) Clearly, housing first has not succeeded in solving the homelessness problem. We are our own best example. Portland introduced a "ten-year plan to end homelessness" based on housing first in 2004 when we had an estimated 4000 homeless people. We now have over 11000, at the last estimate. So even if you gave the 10-year plan 20 years to succeed, it has still failed miserably. Of course nothing can shake the belief of housing first advocates. It's time for the rest of us to focus on outcomes!

### **3. How do we create housing sufficient to meet future needs, not just current needs? What mix of housing does that look like to you?**

In order to create more housing of every kind, we must remove barriers and disincentives to building in Portland. We should continue to improve and streamline the permitting process. We should provide stable funding for permitting, so that recovery after an economic decline is not hampered by underfunding for permitting and understaffing for permitting and inspections. Portland definitely needs to be thinking more about what neighboring cities are doing to ensure that it is a competitive market for builders and developers to build in. If it isn't, they will continue to build outside of Portland.

In order to understand the problems with building housing in Portland, we must listen to and work collaboratively with developers and builders, who will actually be building the new housing Portland wants and needs. They will build where they can do so most efficiently and cost effectively.

I believe we need all kinds of new housing in Portland. All new housing is good new housing. However, it is clear that we are desperately short of affordable housing. We need inexpensive multi-family housing. We need affordable single-family housing. We need multi-family housing with ground floor commercial, in the right locations. We need to look

at ways to incentivize auxiliary dwelling units in single family neighborhoods to increase density without changing the character of the neighborhoods.

**4. When you think of public safety, what does that mean to you? What will you do to ensure public safety for all Portlanders as a member of the city council?**

Public safety to me involves two things. Not just crime statistics, which some people think of as an objective measure of how safe a city is, but also public perception. If the residents of Portland do not feel that the city is safe, then the statistics alone don't matter. While people are often focused on violent crime numbers, it is the so-called "petty" crimes that people experience daily such as shoplifting or the open sale and use of narcotics, that make people feel unsafe in their daily lives.

The first thing the City Council must do is make sure that we have sufficient funding to increase the number of police officers. We must reduce 911 wait times and police response times. We must ensure that there are sufficient officers to respond to calls in a timely manner. Just the other day we had officers show up to investigate a break-in alarm 7 hours after the alarm went off. That is an unacceptable response time by any measure.

**5. What do you see as Portland's economic engine, and what do you believe it should be for the future?**

Small business is the economic driver of any city. Portland must be a city where people want to start businesses and where they can succeed. In addition, it must be a place where their employees want to live, and where they can afford to live.

I believe that many of the industries of today and the future are not manufacturing based, but are information and technology based. That means they are no longer tied to traditional transportation and shipping hubs and can be located almost anywhere. If Portland wants to attract and retain those kinds of industries, it must regain its image as a wonderful place where people want to live, while also making sure that its tax structure, regulations, and economic policies are attractive to business looking for a place to locate. Whether that is new business looking to for a place to start up or existing businesses looking for a place to relocate or expand.

**6. Tell us about your leadership style. How will you work with constituents and interest groups? How are you going to address the inevitable disagreements in a brand new council of 12?**

My leadership style is very much about meeting people where they are to motivate them towards common goals. It is about listening to people. All the people, not just the loudest people. I believe political representatives are elected to lead, but ultimately to lead people through the hard work of getting where they want to go, not to force things on them that they don't want. A leader must be open to ideas, wherever they come from, to make the best decisions. However, a leader must also be willing and able to make difficult decisions and recognize that they are ultimately responsible.

In an organization like the new city council, it will be important to find points of commonality. We will disagree on some things, but what do we agree on that we can accomplish? Let's get those things done. I will be open to good ideas wherever they come from. I will work hard to not fall into the trap of rejecting an idea just because I disagree with someone on a different issue. Too often we have seen public officials reject things out of hand merely they were suggested by person from another party. That accomplishes nothing.

## **7. What would you do to align Portland's taxing and spending with our city's needs and values?**

I will focus on making sure that our spending is returning the results we want. Portlanders pay the highest taxes in Oregon. They will only tolerate that if they believe they are receiving the benefit of that burden. Right now, they don't. Too often they feel they are getting taxed way too much only to live in a city that has been unable to address its many problems despite spending huge amounts of money. Worse yet, they often feel the city is spending their money to affirmatively make their lives more difficult. Just ask anyone in East Portland about what was done to Division or Glisan or what is going to be done to 82<sup>nd</sup> or 122<sup>nd</sup>.

I also see that Portland's needs are often in conflict with what it perceives its "values" to be. Portland wants to see itself as a progressive, compassionate, and inclusive city, amongst other things. Those are positive values. However, it needs additional housing, greater public safety, and to attract and retain businesses. Too often "progressivism" and "compassion" have manifested as "anti-policing", policies that undermine business, and policies that increase the cost of housing, especially low-income housing, to such a degree that builders and developers are disincentivized to build it.

I believe we need to let our values guide our goals, and then implement policies that accomplish our goals. When we focus on our values at the policy level, I believe we end up with too many programs that make people feel good, but don't accomplish the results we need. For example, it makes people feel good to give tents and sleeping bags to people

living on the street, but does making it easier to live on the street get Portland closer to the goal of reducing its homeless population? If your goal is to build as much affordable housing as possible, you need to be focused on that goal and how to achieve it and reject policies that make building it more difficult, even if you think those policies reflect your other values. We must focus on what we are trying to achieve. Well defined goals create an objective measure: does this program, policy, or tax make accomplishing our goal more likely?

**8. Is there an issue, topic, or policy we didn't ask about, but is very important to you? If so, feel free to ask and answer your own question(s).**

**What should transportation policy look like in the City of Portland?**

The federal government and virtually every major city in the United States have bought into what is called the "Vision Zero" program. A program that originated in Sweden and has had some success in other European countries. The underlying basis for the program is the idea that the goal of transportation policy should be to reduce the total number of traffic fatalities to zero. While it is impossible to argue that traffic fatalities aren't a tragedy, it does not necessarily follow that being solely focused on reducing them to zero creates good transportation policy. It doesn't.

First and most importantly, it doesn't work in the United States. European Cities and American Cities are very different, and the outcomes have been very different. Vision Zero policies have failed in every single city in the United States that has adopted them. Traffic fatalities have doubled in Portland since the city began implementation of Vision Zero. Secondly, people affected by the changes the city has made, absolutely hate them. ...and "hate" is not too strong a word, as I mention in the answer to question 7. Even if Vision Zero worked, which it doesn't, the people don't want it and so we should not do it. Some of us are old enough to remember the nation-wide 55mph speed limit. No one debates that it saved lives. It doesn't exist anymore. Why? The people didn't want it. In a democracy, the people have the right to make those kinds of decisions.

We need a transportation policy for Portland the goal of which is to make all types of transportation as efficient as possible. Portland is now consistently ranked as one of the worst cities in the United States to drive in. We need leaders who see that as a problem, not a goal. I am a believer in the value of public transportation and building bicycle infrastructure. I also recognize that, for the vast majority of people, the best, most efficient way, to get around Portland is by car. We need to stop punishing people for driving. We need to take Portland's transportation policy out of the hands of people who believe, as

Chole Eudaly said, “we need to force people out of their cars.” We need to start listening to all the people who use Portland’s transportation infrastructure, not merely the bicycle and other advocates who hate cars.