



2024 Portland City Elections Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to fill out United for Portland's candidate questionnaire. Any candidate seeking our endorsement or support must fill out this questionnaire.

The endorsement process and all responses will be made public on our website.

Please return this questionnaire via email to doug@moorestrategicconsulting.com. Please return it as a Microsoft Word document or as a PDF file by 8/30/24.

All questions are open-ended, and an opportunity to tell us about your thoughts on key issues facing our city, as well as discuss your leadership style. This will be shared on our website, and we ask that you take the time to tell us what you really think and what voters should know about you. There are no right answers to these questions, and we don't want you simply telling us what you think we want to hear.

If you need further information about any of the items covered in the questionnaire, please give United for Portland Executive Director Doug Moore a call at 503-729-5175 or email doug@moorestrategicconsulting.com.

Candidate Name: James Armstrong

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Candidate Signature: *James Armstrong* (can be electronic or signed).

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

Yes

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

We need a comprehensive plan that utilizes all of our available tools to end our unsheltered homeless crisis. I will break down my approach into short-term and long-term initiatives.

Short-Term



Our success in managing a crisis at this scale will require a coordinated plan between City and County leadership. We cannot continue the status quo of poor communication, misunderstandings, and contradicting policies. In the first three months, our council needs to commit to a plan that details our vision for the continuum of care, from establishing a consistent protocol for interactions with public safety officers to the ultimate goal of permanent housing. We need to designate specific city and county roles, and identify and fill any gaps in this continuum with actionable resolutions.

As a council member, I can offer two achievable short-term goals that I believe will have a positive impact on our current crisis. The first is the active support of our current low-barrier shelter system with city public safety resources. Through the Joint Office of Homeless Services, our region is spending millions of dollars investing in shelters with various degrees of support services. Unfortunately, many of those facilities face difficult operating environments, with drug dealing and unsanctioned camping directly surrounding the facilities. We need to prioritize the health and safety of the unhoused population as well as our dedicated public safety employees, public servants and volunteers, and the neighboring residents and businesses.

A prime example of this concern in District 2, is the Arbor Lodge shelter and the subsequent issues with a neighboring abandoned business (see: [Article](#)). In speaking with the operator of that shelter, we determined that an active patrol and partnership with Portland Police or Street Response would help to deter activity that interferes with the goal of providing vital public services in a safe and effective way going forward. This will allow for two positive outcomes. One, it will help maintain the livability for neighbors living near these facilities. Two, it will allow for those that are entering the shelter system to have a higher probability of breaking their addiction cycle and making progress towards permanent housing.

The second short-term goal I would like to see the city approve is designed to address individuals or families that need housing but do not require significant supportive services. In District 2, the Kenton Hotel is being sold at a discount to a local non-profit. This non-profit has plans to utilize this former boutique hotel space to house veterans while they await permanent housing opportunities. The non-profit is taking advantage of market conditions that have led to low prices in hospitality specific commercial real estate. With the purchasing power of the City, we could access those same under-performing assets, but have the leverage to negotiate even more favorable terms and potentially unlock hundreds of turn-key opportunities for housing.

Long-term

I feel strongly that our current strategy on homeless services does not meet the scope of our true crisis. Looking ahead 5-10 years, are we comfortable having tiny-home villages spread across our city? Do we think that having our largest service providers headquartered in the center of our commercial districts will ever result in the livability necessary to revitalize these areas? Do you believe this is a temporary crisis, or is it possible we are at the beginning of a migration towards our area given our temperate climate and accommodating culture?

In my opinion, we need to be honest about the scope of our crisis and start making the investments necessary to make real progress. To do that, I have proposed that we champion a campus facility that has the capacity to properly care for thousands of individuals, at all ends of the crisis. Modeled after Haven for Hope in San Antonio, I have proposed that the JOHS build their headquarters in a space that can house low-barriers clients, individuals needing less



support, families seeking emergency housing, and all the other potential victims of the failures in our social safety net. Further, I've proposed that the Expo Center/Delta Park area in District 2 would be a suitable location for this type of regional care environment. (See: [Article](#))

Ten years from now, we need to have access to hundreds more treatment beds, sobering center beds, and mental health care practitioners. We need housing, specifically supportive and subsidized housing at a massive scale. My vision will require the support from all of the stakeholders in our crisis. We have the opportunity to create a regional care campus that could be a model for how the West Coast addresses the growing homeless crisis.

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?

Portland has many opportunities for new housing. The recently passed Portland Housing Production Strategy provides a detailed roadmap with multiple levers to increase housing production in the coming years. I support the majority of initiatives within the strategy and will prioritize oversight on the implementation of those initiatives to ensure their success.

Updates in local zoning restrictions have started to show progress with multi-family building in our local neighborhoods. The success of these programs will depend on our leaders' ability to promote additional density while also recognizing many residents' hesitancy to see change in their local neighborhood. I will use my connections to the local neighborhood associations as a bridge between the need for increased density and the concerns of local neighbors.

For larger development projects, our local retail districts have significant opportunities if we are able to disincentive absentee landlords from hoarding buildings and letting them fall into disrepair. The city can take a more active role in building relationships with these landlords to understand what incentive package (carrot) or penalties (stick) would be helpful in getting these buildings back into the market. In my time as the Board President of Alberta Main Street, we developed many of those relationships and made significant progress bridging that gap. Unfortunately, the city divested from that program, and those relationships were mostly lost.

Even larger development opportunities, like the Albina Vision Trust and the Lloyd District have the potential to create vast new swathes of housing in our city. These developments need city support, but also massive amounts of outside investment. The Council can aid these efforts by promoting policies and initiatives that improve livability in the city and in turn the overall investment potential for our city as a whole.

In my view, the housing mix should be driven by what residents demand, not by what is easy or profitable to build. Single bedroom condos are useful for my younger employees. But once they have a partner, or begin to start a family, many struggle to find options that provide the space they need at an affordable rate. We need new large multi-family unit buildings near transit corridors, offering car-free living options that can hold hundreds of people. As we move away from transit centers into the neighborhoods, we need to develop smaller worker ready housing with enough bedroom capacity to ensure growing families stay in Portland.



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?

I am torn between two competing feelings when considering this question. As a small business owner, public safety means not having to worry about having our business broken into for the dozenth time. It means not having to install remote locks on our door to keep our employees safe from assault. It means active and vibrant retail business districts, where families walk around at night and shop at our local businesses. Alternatively, as a father of two young children, public safety means not hearing assault weapon shots fired within blocks of my house. It means not being worried that a street racer is going to hit our car while we are driving home on Columbia Blvd. It means not having a mobile home explode within feet of my son's local school.

We have seen an increase in public safety concerns throughout Portland in the past four years. While many communities across the country have seen similar trends as a result of the pandemic, Portland's challenges have been exacerbated by a sharp decline in our city-wide police presence. In the wake of what I believe was a poorly managed response to the social unrest downtown, we've seen a sharp decline in the number of officers that choose to work in Portland. Our role as members of the city council is to foster a positive environment for our police, fire, and street response to recruit and retain essential service providers that share our values for community centered support.

I believe the most efficient and effective way for us to regain a functioning public safety system in Portland is to integrate the Portland Street Response model into our current police precincts. I've ridden along with PPB officers and seen first-hand the nature of 911 calls that come in on a given night. I've also seen the level at which they operate shorthanded and the opportunity that exists for PSR to help immediately. Utilizing our current 911 system and unused office space at our precincts will give PSR an opportunity to operate alongside PPB and help build a new culture of essential service providers working together for our community.

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

Speaking from the perspective of an eye care provider in District 2, we see the majority of our patients come in with insurance plans provided by Nike, Intel, or regional governments. Since the pandemic, we have seen the cluster of insurances change, with many people now working remotely for positions not necessarily based in Portland. In our location in St. Johns, we are more likely to see union-based plans, related to transportation and shipping jobs at our terminals. With that said, I would still describe Portland's economic engine to be centered around international brands that require creative talent.

In the future, Portland needs to restore a leadership position within industries that match the city's culture. The most likely direction for that investment is the future economic needs related to climate change. While Portland lacks buildable space to facilitate large scale manufacturing, future advances in technology will allow for smaller scale manufacturing that can produce more on-demand consumer driven products. There is also an opportunity with the Portland Clean Energy Fund to monitor projects and investments for scalability beyond the scope of the grants.



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 qualities have evolved over the past decade of small business ownership. When we first opened our clinics, we were either the same age or younger than many of our employees and patients. For that, leadership meant showing confidence, and a willingness to lead by example. Over time, I've found leadership can also take on the form of humility. Showing your employees that it's OK to make mistakes, or taking accountability for decisions that don't go exactly as expected builds the trust that is required to be an effective leader.

Building on the concept of humility, I believe a successful relationship with constituents and interest groups will require honesty and open communication. Politicians often fall into the trap of trying to impress everyone and relying on defensiveness when they have setbacks. I believe the best path towards building trust is to be honest about the challenges you face, the steps you've taken to overcome them, and the commitment you have to continue the work to move things forward.

I have no concerns about working with the new council and managing disagreements. I have a diplomatic personality, which is evidenced by over a decade of business partnership with my wife. I envision myself as the council peacemaker, utilizing my skill to see the forest through the trees, and identifying opportunities to find commonalities among conflicting interests.

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

It's safe to say that Portland voters are not satisfied with the current value proposition offered by our regional governments. I have heard from the most progressive voters that they are frustrated with the lack of results shown in relation to their overall tax burden. In my opinion, the city needs to take a close look at areas of spending that do not fit the core purpose of a city budget.

Perhaps the best example of this is with our investment in our small business communities. Prosper Portland, Venture Portland, and the Office of Civic Life all have a role to play in supporting small business. Unfortunately, only a small fraction of that spending is invested in on-the-ground staffing to support small businesses. The result for small business owners is a lack of clarity on how to access support, long delays in communication, and a system that spends most of its money on administration instead of results.

I believe my experience as a forensic accountant has positioned me well to help address our voters' concerns about city spending. I am well versed in analyzing financial documents and spending patterns. Utilizing a "sources and uses" approach to financial modeling, I will dig into how funds are generated, how they are appropriated, and the eventual results of how they are spent. I would be a voice for focusing on how we can be more efficient and effective with our limited resources.



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).

Are there issues specific to your district that you feel particularly qualified to address?

As a small business owner with three retail businesses across our district, I have a unique micro-level view on many of the issues that concern voters. During my campaign, I have found that my local perspective on these issues has distinguished me amongst the other candidates. For example, during a Soul District organized walk of NE MLK Jr Blvd, I explained to PBOT representatives the dangers we see from our Eyestrong location, and how safety improvements on the street could benefit local small businesses.

The most notable local issue that I've been directly involved with since beginning my campaign is the proposed BottleDrop relocation into the St. Johns neighborhood. I have been a vocal leader opposing this development, and have engaged with local elected officials to support that opposition. My effectiveness on this topic comes from my experience as a leader in the St. Johns business community. I have spent the past few years advocating for additional support to help address the livability concerns impacting that neighborhood. I've seen firsthand how the rise of property crime and behavioral health issues have led to business closures and population decline. That experience gives my testimony credibility, as I speak about the region's inability to absorb additional issues that would come with a relocated BottleDrop.