



## 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](mailto: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](mailto:doug@moorestrategicconsulting.com).

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**Candidate Signature:**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sameer K Kanal".

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

Yes! I would like people to know I am committed to practical solutions to Portland's problems, evidence-based policymaking, and an ambitious vision for our future.

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

We have data showing that both in Portland and around the country, 80% or more of homeless people are people who are effectively in an episodic state of homelessness (as compared to a more chronic state). These are individuals who but for a bad month or two would be housed, and with some help can move back into long-term housing (possibly with a stop along the way in short-term shelters). My intent is to focus there first, because if I'm coming back to people in 2028, asking for support and saying, "I've



served a four-year term and we've addressed over 80% of unsheltered homelessness by getting people into some form of housing," I think people would be very happy. That doesn't mean ignoring the other 20%, but it does mean focusing on what can be done quickly and cost-efficiently to build momentum for the harder part of the problem.

This starts with prevention - ensuring people do not become homeless in the first place. I signed the Renters Bill of Rights to stop evictions for late rent of people during extreme weather events, or of kids and teachers during the school year, because keeping people in their homes is a huge part of the solution and significantly more cost-efficient than helping people who have already become homeless.

The next step deals with how we get homeless people into shelter, including programs like:

- scaling up Shelter Services' outreach team, which on a shoestring budget has increased the placement of people into shelter dramatically, and making it a core part of our direct shelter placement efforts;
- building a City-run dashboard so homeless people and providers can see where beds are available in real time instead of having to call one shelter at a time asking if they have space;
- scaling up sanctioned campsites where connection to services is easier and more seamless, in particular self-governing shelter models like Right2Dream2
- building shelters that work for everyone, like the Queer Affinity Village in Southwest Portland which is built specifically for LGBTQ2SIA+ residents, so that everyone has a place they can safely shelter.

Finally, we need to increase housing stock as addressed in the next question. Related to that, we need policy interventions to ensure housing units remain in the market.

### **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?**

We need to increase housing stock through new construction across categories (market-rate, affordable, subsidized, and social housing), through support for office conversions and motel conversions in places like 82nd and Interstate, as well as properties like the Washington Center downtown. During the EcoNorthwest presentation, I appreciated the reasoning the presenters gave about why we need multiple types of housing, and I agree with it. More supply across the spectrum of housing options will help ensure available and affordable housing for everyone, though I do appreciate an emphasis on lower-rent homes. (And, though we didn't get too deep into the issue here, an emphasis on ownership and assisting first-time homebuyers as well.)

We create it in part by building on the consolidation of permitting into a single bureau - which I support - by adding a case-management approach to permitting, where all changes made at a single address at the same time go to a single staff member at Portland Permitting and Development (PP&D) rather than multiple teams in the same bureau (which is better than our old system, but not where it needs to be). If



you want to build a retaining wall, add a sunroom, and build an ADU at a single-family house at the same time, that can go to one person and they can help get all the required approvals, because having to navigate a byzantine system at the City is a deterrent to improvements and ultimately to expanding our housing stock. Another thing we need to do is incentivize office conversions downtown, with the amount based on the cost to buy and convert the building directly as the City.

For the long-term, we also need to be establishing goals that will both make up for the deficit in housing development that already exists and anticipates future growth for the City. I support Inner Eastside for All and other programs that will expand housing stock in the already-built-up parts of the City, and larger-scale projects like the housing development on Williams near Dawson Park and Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church in my district, which will create hundreds of new units at a time. Finally, we need to be ensuring that our urban planning and zoning decisions incentivize a mix of residential and commercial that is designed for our future economy, not for a pre-COVID mindset, in particular downtown. Downtowns around the country which are arts and culture districts, and where people live as well as work, have recovered much better than downtown business districts like ours. We need to get people to live and hang out after hours in our downtown, which has downstream effects supporting both overall economic growth and safety as well.

**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?**

Safety looks like help when you need it, and a government that does not harm you - and is held accountable if it does. My vision is preventative and holistic. As a member of Portland City Council I will prioritize the following:

- Economic growth and housing affordability, as addressed in other questions, to reduce the likelihood of unsafe activity including crime as well as substance abuse.
- Activating spaces, because active spaces are safe spaces. This includes making it easier for community to hold events in our parks, plazas, and community centers, and City programming to help bring pro-social activity into areas in which unsafe activities might otherwise grow.
- Improving our built environment to reduce safety risks, including through safe routes to school, filling potholes and painting crosswalks, and keeping streetlights functional.
- Making Portland Street Response a core part of our first responder network, as a standalone bureau, with 24/7 Citywide coverage dispatched through 911, opportunities for warm handoffs of calls to/from other responders, and policy changes to allow for responses to a broader variety of behavioral health issues (such as if a person enters a public building during business hours, enters the street, or has a small knife, all of which they are not allowed to respond to presently).



- Staffing 911 appropriately, and investing in technologies for the 911 system as well, to ensure achieving the industry goal of 90% of calls answered within 10 seconds and rapid dispatch of the appropriate responder for each call.
- Implementation of the community police oversight board, based on the recommendations of the Police Accountability Commission, which its members and I (as the PAC's project manager) presented to City Council in September 2023, to ensure that people trust the government and police enough to report a criminal act or a known perpetrator.
- Cost-effective investment, including minimizing use of overtime and avoidance of duplication within the City and between the City and County (for example, in behavioral health, which several different parts of the City and County fund and staff as if they're the only ones working in this field).
- Coordination within the City and between the City and County (including, but not limited to, LPSCC, which I serve on in my day job at the City now).

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

Small business is Portland's economic engine. I come from a small business family, where my mom's union job and benefits working at the state helped create an enabling environment that allowed my father to start a small business and run it for 15 years before selling it and retiring. I want every family to have the opportunity mine did to start a small business and thrive, while building employment opportunities for Portlanders, and in many cases helping to build communities through the creation of third places like coffee shops, bookstores, and restaurants and bars.

I think this should remain our local government's focus - helping ensure that Portlanders can start a small business, can grow that business, and can thrive. Larger businesses are a part of our economic makeup, as are government jobs, but small business is where most economic growth occurs, including new jobs.

Specifically, I would like to make it easier for public-facing businesses like coffee shops, bookstores, and restaurants and bars (other examples include music venues, manufacturers ranging from knifemakers to hot sauce kitchens, and our apparel and footwear industries) to thrive, including through continued permitting reform, government-funded makers markets, policy requiring government to buy primarily from Portland-based businesses, and policy reform at the City, county, and state levels to make it easier for people to have the support and structure to start a business, like my family did, in the first place.

**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?**

In brief, I am a consensus-builder between key stakeholders who also emphasizes community engagement with constituents broadly as well as interest groups, service providers, and advocates from groups representing communities within the city.



More specifically, I am a consensus-builder *with a proven track record at the City already*. I was hired as Project Manager for the Police Accountability Commission after the 20 community members were appointed. These volunteers represented diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, and were given what was often called a “four-year task” - but only 20 months. I was the only staffer for the first year, and helped set up the systems and culture to work together both within the group and externally, to City stakeholders and to the public at large. I am extremely proud that the commission finished its work on time, and on budget. I am proudest that the commission approved its recommendations unanimously. I have taken the same skills and approach to other groups.

I will work to develop similar systems and culture on the City Council, so that we can work together as a group and also build consensus around tough issues. I am an open communicator, with clear values I won't be moved on, and I am also open-minded about strategies to get from where we are to where we need to go. I will be effective at building coalitions and getting our policy priorities over the line. Inclusion, consensus-building, and fidelity to community concerns - these are the skills we need on our City Council - and these are skills I have developed over the past two decades.

Engaging with the community, is central to my approach as a leader, and my intention as a City Council member is to operationalize this by:

- Building in community engagement both before developing a rough direction and vision for a project or issue area, and again throughout the steps of developing programs and policies that work towards that vision;
- Engaging with the maximum number of people possible, with a primary focus on those most affected by the issue in question;
- Engaging with community leaders and service providers, but going beyond them and talking to as many people in the community as possible to avoid intentional or unintentional gatekeeping of community members;
- Listening - not just talking to people or people talking to you, but actually letting community drive the policy-making process, at minimum in terms of shared goals and values, and co-creating the future together.

I am experienced at working across the various forms of diversity in Portland - more obvious factors such as race and gender, but also across generations and ideologies, because our diversity of *thought* is often left out when discussing the range of people and groups we need to talk about and talk to. For example, in the context of police accountability the idea of who is “most affected by the issue in question” often includes people of color and people experiencing mental illness. We also took the time to engage with victims of crime, however, who a) often overlap significantly with people of color and people experiencing mental illness, and b) often have somewhat different viewpoints than those who engage through the other two categorizations.

I will address disagreement through open communication rather than leaving people out; through appeal to shared values such as community-driven policymaking and use of data; and through patience and continual negotiation. When it comes down to it, I'm willing to be the single vote in an 11-1 (or 1-11) vote, but my preference is to work together to build at least 7 (and ideally 12) votes in favor of strong policy.



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

I have a larger focus on spending - specifically, ending wasteful spending on things that don't work and don't reflect our values. I am not a person who believes our government should be smaller because that is a virtue unto itself; instead, I am someone who understands practically that if government asks the people to authorize a new tax or reauthorize an existing one, people will ask the predictable and fair question, "how did you spend the last one?" - and also someone who understands specifically that today, our local government's answers are not always well-accepted by Portlanders. I often cite the fact that our City budget was slightly over \$4.5b seven or eight years ago, and is over \$8b now. Even factoring in inflation, this is a ~50% increase in the City's expenditures, and I'd be surprised if even 1 Portlander felt they were getting 50% more services from the City than they were in 2017.

First, I would rapidly and significantly reduce the use of contractors. In my day job, I have been forced to hire contractors for work that could have been done internally had we only had the staff and positional authority to do so. This is not a criticism of these contractors or their work, but rather a criticism of the policies around this. Contracting with private firms is designed in theory to save money in the long-term, by reducing ongoing personnel expenses through staffing up. However, we often contract on long-term basis, and in the aggregate this increases costs. I separate contractors in my mind between those that *do* things and those that *think* for the City. I generally want to avoid *thinking* contractors - those who we pay to tell us we did something or we need to do something, or worse, those who are selected without open processes to tell us things that support a particular political viewpoint. For *doing* contractors, I think truly short-term projects or projects in which we lack a cultural competency makes sense, like a construction project or support doing community engagement with a specific community, for contractors. I support grants, like the violence prevention grants to community-based organizations with targeted focuses, as well. We also need to prioritize local contractors, and advocate at the state level for better rules around COBID certification (e.g. allowing nonprofits to qualify and allowing immediate certification for instantaneously-verifiable information like how long a business has existed rather than months-long delays).

Second, we also must be data-driven. We have seen that the most cost-effective way to get the majority of homeless people (specifically, the episodically homeless population addressed in question 2 above) into shelter is sustained outreach, which has been made more effective by combining some of the street outreach with the Temporary Alternative Shelter Sites and Safe Rest Villages programs under the City's Shelter Services umbrella. Data tells us this is more effective than a series of one-off, uncoordinated efforts to convince homeless people to move into shelter - and it's also cheaper than leaving people uncontacted or using police overtime for this purpose. While our values should determine our desired destinations, we should be flexible on the *how*. We should try multiple approaches, and see what works (both in terms of effectiveness and cost), before committing to a single approach. Together, this will bring our costs down.

On the taxation side, we have a patchwork of bonds, levies, and specific taxes that are confusing to the average Portlander. I'd like the City to begin by being more transparent about this, showing "if you live in Portland, you're going to pay A, B, and C; if you make over \$125k, you'll also pay D and E." I'd also like



all taxes to be collected the same way - our Arts Tax has a lower compliance rate than other taxes because of having to go fill out another form. Finally, I'd focus on reducing both fees (for example, on permits) and required third-party expenses (for example, high insurance requirements to rent a park) to make it easier to live a more full life in Portland rather than only a resident and/or employee.

**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).**

In addition to community safety for all, housing for all and housing affordability, and good governance, all of which previous questions have addressed, a primary focus of my platform is infrastructure for all.

I support clearing PBOT's deferred maintenance backlog, which now totals over \$4b. While this will not be done in a single year, it is a high priority for me because of the cost of unmaintained infrastructure being passed on to the people. When potholes remain unfilled, maintenance costs go up for cars, trucks, and buses, which either directly affect Portlanders' budgets or indirectly through higher costs of delivering food to your grocery store or higher bus fares.

We must also move the responsibility of building sidewalks from private property owners to the government, which can at scale build sidewalks more cheaply and which would align Portland with the majority of other major cities.

Finally, I support the Interstate Bridge Replacement project, and as someone who has worked in Clark County politics as well as for Governor Inslee in Washington, I have the understanding of the other side of the river's interests and can help build consensus when disagreements arise. I also support the I-5 lid project in lower Albina, and both projects will grow our economy through local construction jobs and these workers' spending at nearby businesses.