

Kate Rosenbarger (D-District 2) Responses to Heading Home Candidate Survey for the May 2, 2023 Bloomington Council Primary Election

1. What do you see as the most effective strategies to strengthen housing security in our community, ensuring that everyone has a safe, stable place to live?

So many factors increase barriers to housing security for residents in our community, such as financial issues and the lack of living-wage jobs, and mental and physical health issues. But make no mistake, our severe lack of available affordable housing is the largest barrier to housing security. We can work to decrease these barriers in order to strengthen housing security for our residents.

First, Bloomington government can work with our community's major employers and the Bloomington Chamber of Commerce to encourage and incentivize living wage jobs. We all do better when everyone is able to earn a stable income. Second, mental health *is* public health, and we can and should play a role in increasing residents' access to recovery and treatment. We can continue to partner with Monroe County and agencies who are working to reduce stigma, to support community care and mutual-aid initiatives.

The most important way to strengthen housing security is to create more housing. Long-term solutions that are at the discretion of the City Council are low and no-cost, but they do require bold action. Bloomington is suffering from a severe housing shortage - we are at a 98% occupancy rate, which means people hoping to buy or rent in Bloomington are unable to find housing, whether they are looking for a single family home or an apartment. We must ensure we are developing housing that is accessible for all residents at all income levels, is resilient and responsive to our changing environment, and contributes to the well-being of our communities and residents throughout its design, construction, and maintenance.

2. What are your top 3 council legislative priorities to address the scarcity of low-income housing in Bloomington?]

Bloomington plays a critical role in ensuring that we have housing that is accessible for all income levels. There are many things we can do, it is hard to highlight my top three. We can work within our development ordinance to increase incentives for developers to offer affordable housing; increase mixed-income housing near walkable and transit-friendly areas; encourage more ADUs, smaller lot sizes, and condoizing multi-family buildings. We can continue supporting the Bloomington Housing Authority, incentivize

landlords to accept housing vouchers, better incorporate a community land trust model to make homes permanently more affordable, and consider a community option to purchase to prevent tenant displacement and preserve affordable rental housing.

Because the state disallows us to require that affordable housing be included in new developments, we must get creative. We can (and do) offer incentives to housing developers if they include affordable units in their market rate projects. For example, allowing a developer to add units to a project if a certain percentage of units are affordable.

We can examine how Bloomington regulates the number of unrelated adults living together. One way communities are tackling housing affordability issues is by allowing the number of bedrooms in a unit to determine how many unrelated adults can live in a unit. For example, if the unit has 4 bedrooms, then 4 unrelated adults are legally allowed to live in that unit. When bedrooms are for people, rents are shared with others, making the entire unit more affordable.

3. What actions should the City of Bloomington take to reduce homelessness, and what would you do on council to implement those actions?

The City of Bloomington should continue to support and devote funding to the agencies working on reducing homelessness in our community. Reducing homelessness is incredibly complex, and so many of us are devoted to making it happen. Experts in this - Heading Home, Beacon, New Hope for Families (to name a few) - are making headway and supporting our residents. I have immense respect for them and the work they are doing. Our community has chosen to tackle veteran homelessness first, and I think we will achieve housing for all homeless veterans in the not-so-distant future.

One data point that floors me every time I hear it is that you are more likely to be homeless the first year of your life than in any other year. We must be kind and compassionate with the people we encounter. We must continue to look toward models that are working - housing first, for example - and put them into practice here. We can implement a tiny home pilot program and measure its impact.

One important note here is that over the past 13 years, the growth of the homeless population (about 10%) is slightly smaller than the growth of the total population (about 11%). By continuing to support the work of agencies and allocating funding to the cause, we can take big strides in creating housing for all of our residents.