

Andy Ruff (D-At-Large) 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?

The City currently is involved in dozens of programs with multiple agency, government, and business partners to develop and sustain programs that provide housing options for our housing-insecure neighbors, including programs that meet both temporary emergency and permanent long-term housing needs. The City of Bloomington provides staff time, resources, and hundreds of thousands of dollars annually for programs in our community that support meeting the needs of the housing insecure in our community. It takes multiple programs and multiple strategies because there are almost as many different causes for housing insecurity as there are individuals who are housing insecure. The City cannot reasonably take on and manage and administer these programs, but rather must continue to support, fund, and work with all our community partners that do specialize in this important work. I don't pretend to have ideas as a candidate that the many dedicated professionals, employees, and volunteers don't already have and aren't already trying to put into action in our community. As a Council member I would strongly support continuing and even increasing robust City government contributions and partnerships to address the needs of our housing insecure neighbors. And when it comes to new or additional programs and needs for City resources to dedicate to the the problem I would listen to those with expertise and those working in the trenches in our community (including many of our own City Department staff members) to tackle this difficult and extremely important issue in our community.

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

The housing affordability issue seems to me to be as much about relatively low wages in our community as it is the cost of housing. So one of my top three priorities would be to help make sure to the best of a Councilmember's ability that the active, subsidized economic development efforts of City government are focused on increasing the level of the wage floor for as many jobs as possible, as we did with our City's Living Wage Ordinance 18 years ago, and on increasing the area median wage, and not so much just on increasing the total number of jobs. Also the City needs to be a strong supporter of organized labor, just as it is a strong support of business, because unions are one of the most important ways to insure that workers have the necessary power to secure a fair share of the gains of the economy. Another priority would be to protect the older,

modest homes in our neighborhoods that have aged into relative affordability from being priced more out of access to lower income hopeful homeowners by allowing them to be converted into multi-unit market-rate rentals, which are not affordable in any way and deprive others from being able to buy and generate homeowner equity. A third priority would be to further pursue community land-trust developments where the City partners with development groups using City-owned parcels and City-supplied/subsidized infrastructure inputs in exchange for construction of long-term affordable housing units.

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

The ultimate causes of homelessness are largely due to economic, political, and social forces of state, national, and global scale. Though communities like Bloomington do a tremendous amount to try reduce homelessness and address the needs of the unhoused, there is only so much a community can do - but we should absolutely do what we can do. Given that it is a problem involving causes and forces far beyond the scale of Bloomington, one thing the City should be doing is constantly lobbying the state and our federal delegation to make changes at the state and federal level that will help address some of the larger economic and political causes of homelessness. For example, as caring and generous a community as we are, Bloomington cannot shoulder the needs of the unhoused from the rest of the state or even beyond. The state needs to partner with communities all across the state so those communities can begin to serve the unhoused in their communities, where people in difficult circumstances have family and friends and support networks. This may seem unrealistic in some ways or impractical, but is it really any more impractical than somehow being able to locally counter state, national and global forces and trends? Is it more impractical than the idea that Bloomington can continue to be a magnet for unhoused people, with the more investment the community makes and the more programs and services offered that then leads to bringing more people in need to Bloomington?