

# COUNCIL CONFIRMATION PROCESS --- OFFICE OF HOUSING DIRECTOR

## April 22, 2011

### Responses to Questions:

#### 1. Please name and describe past departmental or organizational accomplishments.

I have served as acting Director of the Office of Housing for just over one year. During that time the Office of Housing's key accomplishments include the following:

- OH's extraordinary Housing Levy history; 2010 was the first full year of the 2009 Housing Levy renewal --- In 2010 the Housing Levy Administrative and Financial (A&F) Plan needed to be adopted before the new 2009 Housing Levy monies could be allocated to projects. The A&F Plan is the document that contains policies that guide Levy administration; the Plan was adopted in spring 2010. The new Levy was launched in 2010 quickly and efficiently, with solid achievements in all program areas.
- Multifamily Rental Program NOFA Process --- Following adoption of the A&F Plan, rental program funding was announced. Applications were accepted and reviewed; last December 11 projects were funded with \$23 million, containing 666 units.
- Homeownership Program NOFA Process --- Funding available to assist first time homebuyers was announced in mid 2010; \$4.2 million was awarded to agencies that will help an estimated 98 first time buyers.
- Weatherization --- OH's program to help low-income renters and owners through a variety of energy saving upgrades was challenged early in 2010 with the need to quickly ramp up activity to take advantage of \$4 million in additional federal funding. The program quickly shifted toward multifamily rental building improvements from single family homes. The program ended 2010 by awarding \$6.2 million to weatherize 1,364 apartments and 291 single family homes. Success has been rewarded with additional funding being offered by the State in 2011 due to unspent funding in other areas of the State.
- RSJI --- in addition to a variety of staff training and awareness activities, OH accomplished these key initiatives:
  - ❖ **Who lives in OH funded projects:** In 2009, OH's Asset Management Team produced a report of the demographic make-up of resident buildings in the OH portfolio, including a special look at the 'Housing First' projects. The findings indicate that housing funded by OH is in large part serving people of color in numbers that reflect the racial composition of the homeless population. However, because people of color are over-represented in homelessness, the work to end homelessness continues to be critical as racial

justice work. The Asset Management manager presented the findings to OH during an All-Staff meeting, where issues such as disproportionality were discussed.

❖ **Jail diversion:** OH has been involved in ongoing conversations regarding connections between jail diversion and re-entry programs and supportive housing. As people of color are over-represented in the number of incarcerated individuals, re-entry supportive housing is a solution to ending the cycle of incarceration and homelessness and is important racial and social justice work. In 2009, OH worked with Public Safety departments, the Municipal Court, King County Public Health and Mental Health, Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division to implement a Re-entry Supportive Housing Initiative in Seattle/King County in 2010. One such project, Plymouth Housing Group's Humphrey House was completed and began lease-up in the fall of 2010. The project will provide 40 units of supportive housing for individuals who are frequent users of jail from a unique collaboration with Jail Health Services. Office of Housing also received a grant from the Corporation for Supportive Housing that will fund an evaluation of the Humphrey House project.

- **Wolcott Project**---federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) funding  
Last summer the federal FDIC foreclosed on a 15 home subdivision on Wolcott Avenue in Rainier Beach. Five homes were finished, two homes were left half-built, and 8 foundation pads awaited new construction. City funding helped Homestead Community Land Trust purchase the property at a very good price from the FDIC; new homeowners are moving in and plans are rapidly moving forward to complete construction. City funding included NSP funding that we had received separately to assist in dealing with the adverse impacts associated with foreclosed property.
- **Downtowner Apartments:** 240 unit apartment building at 4<sup>th</sup> and Jackson, housing extremely low-income residents, reaching the end of federal HUD subsidies early in 2011 with displacement of all residents a very good possibility. OH worked with the local HUD office and the Mayor to seek special help from HUD Secretary Donovan and Deputy HUD Secretary Sims to allocate rent vouchers for all residents to prevent displacement. HUD approved 239 vouchers, now in the process of distribution to current residents. This precedent setting move caught the attention of cities across the country who have been calling to see how we accomplished what HUD staff had early on told us was not possible.

These and many more accomplishments are a tribute to very hard-working and dedicated OH staff.

## **2. Identify achievements that are good examples of your leadership approach.**

- Housing Levy A&F Plan --- development of the Plan for Council adoption included the following, indicative of my leadership approach in policy development:
  - ❖ Initial City Council interests: as City Council worked on the Housing Levy package that went on the ballot, Council noted interest in particular program elements and priorities; OH staff began development of the A&F Plan by incorporating those key interests of Council.
  - ❖ Stakeholder Review: many community meetings were held to involve the large number of agencies, nonprofits, and individuals with keen interest in the Levy; all were invited to review and help draft policies and guidelines.
  - ❖ City Council approval process: worked with Councilmember Licata and other Councilmembers to determine particular areas of interest; gathered additional data and presented issue options; helped craft workable policy language addressing concerns.
- Weatherization --- faced with the need to ramp up program efforts early in 2010 (significant additional federal funding and need to shift from historic focus on single family homes to a mix of single family and multifamily buildings) I worked with staff to determine new program goals and procedures needed to move towards those goals. A solid team approach helped the program quickly reach new levels of production and achieve important energy savings.
- Transit Oriented Development (TOD) --- work to shift more affordable housing production to transit-rich locations. Early in 2010 OH began to signal to our nonprofit partners a strong interest in serving key Levy-priority populations in locations close to transit, in areas where low-income families can save both transportation and housing costs. We signaled that interest in a number of ways, including forming policies with stakeholder involvement, working with Sound Transit and other agencies. In late 2010, we were able to fund a number of new TOD projects as nonprofits responded to new directions.

## **3. Describe your ability to complete projects and work programs in a timely fashion.**

I am a type-A personality committed to tracking and completing work assignments in a timely way. I have found it important to prioritize work in the following order:

- (1) Requests from Mayor's Office and City Council (performance expectations; direct data and information requests);
- (2) Requests from OH staff needing my help to meet their deadlines.
- (3) Key external deadlines affecting high priority projects/initiatives.
- (4) Everything else.

I meet with management staff individually and together as a group on a regular basis to discuss key work program activity to make sure deadlines are met---these meetings are useful to track response progress to intervene if necessary; sometimes staff need to be

temporarily reassigned to meet important deadlines. If it appears we will need more time, I quickly alert those expecting work by certain dates to negotiate more time or adjust expected deliverables.

**4. What experience do you have balancing budget priorities in an environment where budget reductions are necessary?**

Thanks to the Great Recession I am gaining significant additional experience. Over the last 2 years we have had to spend increasing time on determining core activity vs “good to do if time permits” activity. We lost 2 key staff positions heading into 2011---each week we have to make decisions on what gets done vs what waits or is dropped. Our core work now is in 2 areas:

- Performance expectations and outcomes identified with the Mayor’s Office, and
- City Council requirements for periodic review, reporting, and renewing program policies and production.

I have been with the City long enough to have experienced several down cycles, when work priorities needed to be re-examined and staff positions lost. While extremely difficult decisions inevitably need to be made, budget reductions do force a look at what really is important.

**5. Give an example of your strategic planning abilities and describe an experience using strategic planning.**

The Office of Housing’s Work Program is filled with strategic planning activities and initiatives---in general I use the 3 key elements of strategic planning to guide our work: where are we, where do we want to go, and how do we get there. Several examples:

- Weatherization Program: sudden access to millions more in federal funding early in 2010 and then again late in 2010 required us to re-evaluate our program goals and methods. We held many staff meetings to set new direction and then talk through how our day-to-day procedures needed to change. Quickly involving all staff enabled team buy-in and great response by staff---we are well positioned currently to access additional funding not able to be used by programs in other parts of the State.
- Rental Production Program: the 2009 Housing Levy has provided a great source of City funding for additional project development; unfortunately, other sources of leveraged funding is drying up. We have had to re-evaluate our procedures---current economic pressures have required that we adjust or change procedures to help position nonprofits to compete successfully in competitive processes related to other funding sources.
- New data source now becoming available---demographic data now letting us know who is being served in OH’s 10,000+ unit nonprofit loan portfolio. We assisted State Department of Commerce efforts to create a new online statewide database that nonprofit owners can use to input real time occupant data. Initial results are now being made available; we plan to compare results against who the projects were initially funded to serve. We will be determining better uses of the data and potentially

additional items of data desirable to track. The data will help us bring into sharper focus who we are funding projects to house and how best to track outcomes.

**6. Can you demonstrate your commitment to diversity in hiring, workplace operations, contracting, and constituent services?**

I have been committed to diversity in hiring, workplace operations, contracting, and constituent services for as long as I have worked at the City. City employment has, in many ways, taught me the value of diversity. Always important, it is even more critical now as Seattle grows more diverse, and as diversity in many neighborhoods is threatened by displacement. More specifically:

- The demographics of Seattle’s workforce needs to reflect the demographics of the City as a whole; I strongly support hiring processes that lead to a diverse candidate pool and selection.
- OH’s programs need to serve the very diverse subsets of population groups in need of affordable housing---with focus on subpopulations often underserved.
- OH’s Rental Production and Preservation program, in particular, offers many contracting opportunities; I am committed to tracking and meeting or exceeding WMBE aspirational goals as well as HUD Section 3 hiring goals connected to our federal housing funding (Section 3 goals relate to hiring low-income workers).

In addition, I am committed to meeting or exceeding OH’s WMBE aspirational goal for consulting contracts. It is critical that OH programs serve the diverse affordable housing needs of a diverse population. I am committed to making sure we are clear about who we want to serve to accomplish our objectives and then track who we are serving through our programs.

Accomplishing all this requires robust data collection systems to adequately monitor our progress---I am committed to making that a high priority within OH.

**7. What is your organizational management approach?**

My approach starts with key organizational management characteristics I want OH to embrace and reflect:

- **Openness** to new ideas/approaches;
- **Transparency** in decision making/policy basis for programs;
- **Responsive:** fast responses to questions, data requests, and timely response to City Council required reports;
- **Accurate:** use best available information to help use resources most effectively

It is important to start each year with program goals and outcomes---then periodically assess progress and likely need to adjust direction:

- OH’s Work Program is assembled and approved by City Council Jan/Feb each year

- Quarterly reassessments are conducted with staff to update/adjust as necessary
- Annual performance expectations are set with the Mayor's Office; these expectations are then included in performance agreements with management staff, who then have agreements with their staff

Meetings with staff are used to track organizational priorities:

- Periodic all-staff meetings;
- Bi-weekly management team meetings;
- Door is always open to all staff, whenever they want to discuss issues or need my help with a project.

It is very important to get feedback, from OH staff internally as well as from external partners. Housing is a fast-changing environment; external factors (funding availability, nonprofit stability, real estate market conditions) change frequently, affecting our work. It is critical to stay in touch to remain in sync with our funding and production partners and to take advantage of new opportunities.

## **8. How do you address threats to employee morale?**

I have received a lot of feedback from staff over the last year on many issues relating to morale:

- Staff is proud of the work OH does, and wants/likes to know how their work contributes to the greater whole. Periodic staff get-togethers help staff feel connected to the overall organization---it helps that OH is relatively small (39 FTE).
- Staff wants to know that their opinions count and that they are involved in key decisions affecting their work. It is very important to have a management structure that acknowledges, supports, and is committed to making that happen.
- Morale is sometimes adversely affected by issues or problems between employees that fester and are not resolved. Problems that arise need to be addressed quickly and issues worked out.
- Staff wants certainty that when they have concerns, they will be heard and that problems or inequalities will be dealt with in a fair and consistent manner. That is best addressed by striving to maintain an open, supportive environment where staff is comfortable sharing concerns.

To be successful, OH has long had to form, nurture, and maintain successful partnerships with many stakeholder groups and other governmental agencies. At times issues emerge with those partners that can affect OH employee morale. It has been critical to maintain open and frequent communication with our partners. Openness, transparency, and valuing our partners' critical roles, helps OH as a whole do its best work, which contributes greatly to positive employee morale.

**9. Describe an experience that you've had with a public relations challenge? What was the outcome?**

At the Office of Housing I have helped create and administer a variety of housing programs serving the entire low-income housing continuum. These programs range from serving people who are homeless up the income scale to workers earning up to 80% AMI (\$45,000 to \$52,000 per year). Programs at the upper end of the income spectrum are our "incentive programs": property tax exemption and incentive zoning.

I have found these incentive programs to be the most challenging from a public relations perspective:

- They involve the private sector in ways that question public goals vs private sector profit motivation;
- They, particularly incentive zoning, are complicated programs that are very difficult to understand, often leading to misunderstandings.

I believe these programs have a place in the affordable housing "tool box", given the persistent and growing affordable housing needs we face. But we need to figure out how to simplify and demystify these programs.

Eighteen months ago we partnered with Urban Land Institute to host a workshop for interested developers to help them better understand our incentive programs. It ended up being very well attended; over 100 people registered. ULI arranged for panel discussions on several topics; the panels included developers who had used the programs and thought they worked well from their perspective. Having developers talk to developers turned out to work well. We got significant positive feedback from participants---most often heard comment: "Oh that's how these programs work---I think they could be useful." We need to do more public outreach, as well as continue efforts within the City to simplify the programs.

**10. What is your general philosophy for how to most effectively work with a City Council, other elected officials, and citizen advisory bodies? How will you be responsive to their requests in order to accomplish priorities that they have identified in those instances that their priorities compete for time with yours?**

I start with the belief, based on many years working with Seattle elected officials and citizen advisors, that we are all lucky to live in a City with so many smart and committed officials and citizens who devote so much time and energy into making Seattle a caring, compassionate, better place. I have also experienced that Seattle is unique in the degree to which officials and citizens want to work together, often in new and different ways, to bring energy and creativity to the problems our community faces. For me, it continues to be a privilege to work in our creative and committed environment.

Frankly, I have rarely experienced times in a long work career where priorities have competed. Typically officials and citizens with questions, concerns, or work requests call on us for help in shaping what needs to be done (housing issues/solutions tend to get relatively

complicated fairly fast). I have always been happy to help shape the request and respond with data, policy ideas, or program options.

Instances when priorities do compete or conflict generally need:

- Discussions on what is being requested in detail---sometimes what initially appears complicated or time-consuming isn't once the core reason for a request is better understood;
- Understanding of deadline flexibility---often discussion (or negotiation) of the deadline options can help avoid competition for time;
- Sometimes our priorities have to take a back seat to requests from the Mayor or City Councilmembers.

**11. What is your understanding of housing in context of a city that is growing while still seeking environmental sustainability, economic vitality, and social justice with the challenges of transportation, community development and human services demands?**

A growing City presents both increasing challenges as well as unique opportunities. Awareness of how we want to grow here in Seattle is focusing increasingly on the interrelationship between housing, education, environmental sustainability, jobs, transportation, human services and social justice. Housing has several components---in addition to creating and maintaining enough housing to meet growing demand, it is critical to pay attention to "equitable housing" issues. Equitable housing means making sure housing is available for people of all income levels, particularly for population groups that often find it very hard, if not impossible, to find suitable, affordable housing.

Daily we face the challenges of achieving equitable development and social justice. Seattle is a "high cost" City compared to many other cities in the country---we share common challenges with northeast and western coastal cities: high rents, high home prices, gentrification, increasing demand likely to continue well into the future.

Fortunately, we have certain opportunities that we must take advantage of:

- A well educated, caring City that tends to support Levies: housing, transportation, education, to name a few; critically needed resources to help meet our challenges;
- A development community that generally supports the City's long term vision and goals, though some differences of opinion exist on how best to get there;
- A strong civic-minded cadre of officials, agencies, citizens that like to form partnerships to achieve---partnerships that enable more to be done.

**12. Describe your track-record of managing a large department or organization including budget responsibility and accountability for funding.**

During the last 13 months I have served as Acting Director of OH, with substantial responsibility for budgeting and tracking many separate fund sources. Office of Housing staff level in 2011 is 39 FTE; OH's operating budget in 2011 is \$5,046,199; the capital budget is \$35,150,682.

I started working for the City in 1981. During my years at the City I have managed the following sections and teams, beginning in 1981 and moving forward:

- Program development team (Housing Division of the Department of Community Development)
- Multifamily lending/Homeowner Rehabilitation (Housing Division of the Department of Housing and Human Services);
- Policy and Program Development (Office of Housing).

Sections I managed have ranged in size from 2 to 15 staff; I have had experience through the years tracking many housing program fund sources.

Prior to my work at the City I coordinated start-up of Capitol Hill Housing; it began administering a homeowner rehabilitation program on Capitol Hill---I supervised 5-7 staff and was responsible for budgeting and fund management.

**13. Describe your background in private and public housing finance and policy and, ideally, executive experience in the housing industry.**

I have been involved in housing finance and policy issues for the last 30 years. In the early days I focused more on nonprofit development. Over the last 10 years I have focused more on our incentive programs, with a focus on private developer issues and concerns. My experience has provided an understanding of the full affordable housing continuum. More specifically:

- Housing Finance---I have worked on many types of projects, learning the unique characteristics and potential of all the public fund sources and most private. Affordable housing development requires the creative mixing and matching of many sources.
- Nonprofit organizations and development---I started the Capitol Hill Housing Program and have worked with 20+ agencies over the years since on hundreds of projects (as a funder and helping facilitate their development).
- For-profit development---we have strived over the years to fully involve developers in review of our incentive programs, to make sure they are helpful to developers so

they'll be used, and making sure public benefits are maximized. That is a tricky balance---I have earned a lot from Seattle's development community.

- Policy---I have done a significant amount of work over the years helping create, review and update, improve, simplify our housing policies. We continually learn from our stakeholders what works and what doesn't. I am proud of the excellent reputation OH has, both in Seattle and nationally, and intend to work hard to continue that great work.

#### **14. Describe your track record using transit-oriented development to meet affordable housing development goals.**

We have been funding Transit-Orient Development (TOD) projects at OH for many years. Our rental projects are typically mixed-use (retail on ground level) and located on key bus lines. What has been missing until now is the higher speed, higher capacity and more frequent transit service (e.g. light rail). That is rapidly changing as light rail expands and bus Rapid Ride service heads toward reality.

We talked with Councilmembers two years ago about ramping up our TOD efforts as the Housing Levy renewal package was developed -- We wanted to use Housing Levy resources in a geographic more targeted way. Once the Levy passed, we held stakeholder meetings just over a year ago to consider the best way to signal our strong interest in funding projects near key Light Rail and bus Rapid Ride station areas. We incorporated new language into our Housing Levy policies that City Council adopted. In December, we funded eleven new projects, many of which fall into the TOD category:

- DESC's newest project at the Cyndy's Pancake site at 105<sup>th</sup> and Aurora (site of press event announcing our 2010 funding decisions last January);
- Artspace's new project to be built adjacent to the McClellan Station; and
- Mercy Housing's new project site near the Columbia City station.

We are now considering ways to ramp up our efforts even more. Projects like those just funded are critical to achieving our goal of "equitable" TOD --- ensuring that some affordable units are built in transit-rich locations, where new market rate development is likely to be pricey. We are:

- Working with organizations like Enterprise and Impact Capital to consider ways to bring in more financing for site acquisition in good TOD locations;
- Working with Sound Transit on ways to use property no longer needed for Transit construction for affordable housing;
- Working with nonprofits to find TOD sites, and funding acquisition;

We also are working with staff from other cities around the country to learn best practices relating to financing equitable TOD. We are increasingly being asked to participate on panel discussions at national conferences to share information on our efforts. Those meetings are great places to network and learn lessons on how to move forward.

**15. City of Seattle is currently implementing the Race and Social Justice Initiative to address racial and social inequities. In your position, how will you support and implement the Race and Social Justice initiative? Can you provide some specific examples?**

I fully support the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative. I support the OH Change Team efforts to implement a work program that includes a variety of activities throughout the year, including:

- Periodic all-staff meetings to discuss RSJ issues and key work program priorities;
- Change Team meetings to plan events;
- OCR staff training workshops on various topics;
- Tracking many OH program area tasks that relate to the RSJI.

Last July I reported on OH's RSJI progress at Council Committee. We discussed two key initiatives in 2010:

- Our work collecting demographic data on projects OH funds --- helping ensure population groups for whom projects are intended to serve actually are served; and
- Jail diversion --- work with the County to connect jail diversion efforts with re-entry programs and supportive housing.

The 2011 work program includes a number of particular initiatives that will advance our RSJI work:

- Continuing demographic data refinement, looking at data and interpreting what it means for our rental, homebuyer and weatherization programs.
- Fair Housing --- HUD is placing new emphasis on Seattle's "analysis of impediments to Fair Housing" (recent legal settlements and cases that have caused HUD to clarify expectations). OH will be reassessing work done to date and considering new ways to measure and report on effectiveness in 2012 and beyond.
- Housing Locator system--- OH, King County staff, SHA, and the Rental Housing Association are exploring a new on-line tool for landlords to identify vacancies by geographic areas. This tool could significantly help people find housing. In part, the tool could help low-income people find housing; currently there is no single place to go for that information. The system's potential and key administrative questions are being explored.

I look forward to sharing progress on these and other 2011 initiatives with Councilmembers.

**16. At the end of your time here, what achievements do you hope the Office of Housing to have accomplished? What does a successful tenure at the Office of Housing look like under your leadership?**

A successful tenure includes two very important accomplishments:

- (1) Excellent stewardship of the Seattle Housing Levy: exceeding all goals; very good financial and accounting tracking (clean audits); successfully serving priority population groups; implementing new initiatives responding to changing market conditions.
- (2) Seattle Housing Strategic Plan: bringing together our various affordable housing policies and key strategies into a single document, adding 4- or 5-year unit production targets along with annual (if not more frequent) reporting on progress to the Mayor, City Council, Planning Commission. Other major cities across the country (e.g. New York, Chicago) have successfully created such plans to better focus energy, outcome tracking, resources (including attracting new resources). The plan can provide a framework for better and more targeted outcomes.

A successful tenure would combine the following into a creative, robust, and productive response to Seattle's growing housing challenges:

- Increased resources from relatively new sources, which helps accomplish more --- strongly supporting nonprofit private fundraising, philanthropy, partnering with organizations like Impact Capital and Enterprise that specialize in leveraging private funding.
- Creating new public/private partnerships that pull in the private for-profit development community to help maximize our efforts
- Reaching out to State and Federal legislators to help educate/increase awareness of housing needs and innovative legislative solutions (solutions that don't always involve additional funding).
- Supporting partnerships with nonprofits to help nurture and strengthen their ability to innovate and thrive.
- Spread our RSJI principles and objectives throughout every program OH administers --- RSJI isn't a separate initiative; it is integral to all our work.
- Support and maintain an excellent, committed and caring staff at OH in an environment that enables them to do their best work.

- Supporting new Mayor and Council initiatives, both when housing is the focus, and when other issues (e.g. education, jobs, energy, transportation) have a housing link that should be recognized and incorporated.

All these activities can then roll up into achieving the ambitious targets and goals included in the new Seattle Housing Strategic Plan.

**17. Do you believe the department should have specific and measurable outcomes identified for all investments?**

Yes, OH should have specific and measurable outcomes identified for all investments, and does. A significant amount of OH work program activity each year involves allocating capital funding to projects. Each year we estimate capital funding likely to be available and City Council adopts those estimates in our capital budget. Project and unit goals are set out in 3 primary places:

- Housing Levy Administrative and Financial Plan
- Consolidated Plan
- Weatherization funding award agreements with City Light and the State

Highlights for 2011:

- Rental Program: utilize \$25 million in estimated funding to assist an estimated 400-600 units;
- Homebuyer Assistance: utilize \$3 million in estimated funding to assist an estimated 50-70 homebuyers;
- Homeowner Rehabilitation: utilize \$700,000 in estimated funding to assist an estimated 35-40 units;
- HomeWise Weatherization: utilize \$7 million in estimated funding to weatherize an estimated 750 homes;
- Property Tax Exemption Program: approve an estimated 5 applications for an estimated 750 units.

**18. Do you believe the department should continue to invest as it has or should the department invest mostly in new innovative strategies to address human need?**

Both, as has been the case for many years; although the recession is challenging both public funders and nonprofit partners to look more and more to new sources of funding and strategies. Over the years OH has learned how to effectively fund and facilitate development of high quality projects serving important population group priorities. We are, in particular, using Levy resources to continue that important work.

But, at the same time, not all population groups needing help are being reached. Project sponsors must become more vigilant at keeping costs down to help more people in need.

Critical services funding and supports are seeing funding get cut to the bone. New strategies, reflecting more strategic directions are important, especially now.

We are spending increasing amounts of time with our public funding partners to address issues previously mentioned. Some examples:

- The 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness has reached a mid-point review---we are participating to learn more about desired new directions.
- We are working with partners like Impact Capital and Enterprise to determine better ways to support nonprofits during tough economic times.