

[People Power Washington](#) strives to bring just and equitable public safety to our local communities through relationship building, education and policy reform. *We at People Power Washington believe that no matter your race, your gender, or your income, you deserve safety.* We champion policies that divest from police and reinvest in community-based solutions and alternate crisis response, decriminalize non-serious offenses, and implement accountability and enforceable standards for police officers and agencies. Our vision is for public safety in Washington to be community-driven and to meet the needs of all people equitably.

Our group’s work advocating for police accountability in our local communities has made us well aware of the important role our local government and elected officials play in driving policy around this issue. Appreciating the impact that legislation and budget decisions by the City Council have on our day-to-day lives, our hope is to empower voters with a non-partisan resource to understand how to vote their values through a lens of police reform and re-imagining of public safety.

Candidate Information

Candidate Name	ChrisTiana ObeySumner
Position Sought	Seattle City Council District 5
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Part I – Yes/No Questions

Yes	Yes
No	
Additional Comments	

1. Do you support allocation in the City budget for a civilian-led mental health crisis response?

- [Nationwide, in 25% of all officer shootings the individual was suffering from an acute mental health crisis. The mere presence of an officer uniform, badge, and gun is traumatic and can escalate situations.](#)
- Crisis Intervention Teams International (CIT), who provide de-escalation and behavioral health training for law enforcement, has published a position paper that speaks to how national best practices are evolving away from embedded co-responders (police officer & mental health specialist riding together in the same car.) [“Why doesn’t CIT International promote the embedded co-responder model?”](#)

2. Do you support allocation in the City budget to increase the pay of human service workers?

Yes	Yes
No	
Additional Comments	

· Human Service workers provide homeless and housing services, preschool programs, senior care, youth care, food banks, veteran services and aid for survivors of gender-based violence. Right now we are asking them to do this essential work while paying wages so low many of them are facing their own housing instability. As a result, many human service departments face a 50% or greater attrition rate. If we are serious about solving homelessness, we must pay our service providers more.

3. Do you support preserving the JumpStart Tax for housing, Green New Deal, and equitable development?

Yes	Yes
No	
Additional Comments	

- In 2020 the City Council passed JumpStart - a payroll tax to fund housing, Green New Deal, and equitable development. The balanced budget passed by the council in 2023 used JumpStart funds to shore up budget deficits in the short term to avoid austerity budgeting, with the intent of returning JumpStart funds for their legislated purpose after 2024.
- As the City of Seattle continues to grow, we are facing a critical housing shortage. It is fundamentally unsafe to live outside and our unhoused neighbors are facing increased hate crimes and a record number of deaths. We are also continuing to see safety concerns due to the effects of climate change and an annual heat and smoke season.
- Retaining funding to ameliorate these issues that affect our community's public safety is paramount to the future of the City.

4. Do you support removing funds in the City budget for forced encampment removals and instead allocating funds toward a housing first approach?

Yes	Yes
No	
Additional Comments	

- While sweeps increase the trauma and violence experienced by our unhoused neighbors and make it more difficult for human service workers to find them, housing is a proven intervention to reduce the disproportionate levels of violence our homeless community members face.
- And while wrap-around services and substance use disorder treatment are also necessary, a housing first approach has been shown to reduce rates of substance use in and of itself.

5. Do you support abrogating the funds from unfilled SPD positions toward meaningful public safety measures?

Yes	Yes
No	
Additional Comments	

- City departments often have positions that are unfilled. When departments are unable to fill those positions it is standard practice to abrogate those positions and use that salary savings elsewhere in the budget.
- SPD has been exempt from this process in past years, allowing the department to retain funds for positions it cannot fill under the most optimistic hiring plans for the department.
- There are approximately 130 of these “ghost positions” left in the 2023 City budget. [It would take approximately 10 years to fill 130 of these unfilled positions](#) and the retaining of these unused funds for SPD means that money is not available for meaningful public safety measures like affordable housing and gun violence prevention.

6. Do you support allocating money in the City budget for supervised consumption sites?

Yes	Yes
No	
Additional Comments	

- Supervised consumption sites [save lives, build trust, and provide pathways to recovery](#).
- In 2016, the King County Heroin and Prescription Opiate Addiction Task Force [recommended](#) the establishment of a three-year pilot project involving at least two Community Health Engagement Locations to include supervised consumption services, one in Seattle and one outside Seattle.
- In 2018, the Washington State Supreme Court [struck down a ballot measure](#) proposing to ban supervised consumption sites in King County. The City of Seattle had set aside \$1.4 million in 2016 and 2017 to establish one of the two sites.

7. Do you support increasing funding in the City budget for violence intervention programs?

Yes	Yes
No	
Additional Comments	

- Similar to other areas across the country, gun violence is a serious issue within our community that needs to be addressed.
- We know that [violence intervention programs work](#). Bolstering investments in community-led safety initiatives is proven effective, saves lives, and reduces involvement in the criminal legal system.

8. Do you support funding in the City budget for the Social Housing Initiative?

Yes	Yes
No	
Additional Comments	

- In February 2023 Seattle residents voted to pass the Social Housing Initiative.
- Social Housing will create mixed income units that are publicly owned and permanently affordable.
- Though Social Housing is self-sustaining because higher income earners subsidize the rents of lower income earners, capital is needed to initiate the program. The state approved some money for startup costs and the remainder will need to come from the city.
- Increasing affordable housing options is a crucial public safety measure.

9. Do you support a basic income pilot in the City budget?

Yes	Yes
No	
Additional Comments	

- Guaranteed income pilot programs traditionally provide unconditional, individual, regular cash payments intended to support the basic needs of the recipients. Meeting the basic needs of residents increases the overall public safety of a community.

10. Do you oppose adding new crimes to the City code?

Yes	Yes
No	
Additional Comments	

- Cities have jurisdiction over misdemeanor crimes that carry a maximum penalty of 364 days in jail and \$5,000 in fines.
- New misdemeanor crimes tend to criminalize poverty and exacerbate racial disparities in the criminal legal system through unequal enforcement. They increase the public's contact with police.
- Our jail and court systems are beyond capacity and often do not provide the support necessary to address the root causes of criminalized behavior. Seattle's King County Jail has had a record number of deaths in recent months as a result of unsafe conditions. Adding to Seattle's criminal code will increase the population of the jail, the vast majority of whom have not been convicted of any crime and are there only because they are too poor to afford bail or because they are experiencing mental health crises.

11. Would you oppose a SPOG contract that doesn't give both the Office of Police Accountability (OPA) and the Office of Inspector General (OIG) subpoena power?

Yes	Yes
No	
Additional Comments	

- The previous Seattle Police Officer's Guild (SPOG) contract disallows subpoena power, which would allow the OPA and OIG to better investigate police misconduct.
- The city is currently negotiating the next SPOG contract and has the opportunity to negotiate for subpoena power.
- After the SPOG contract is negotiated the full city council will vote on whether or not to accept the contract.

12. Would you oppose a SPOG contract that doesn't remove limitations as to how many of OPA's investigators must be sworn versus civilian?

Yes	Yes
No	

Additional Comments	
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- The current SPOG contract allows only 2 of the 12 investigators to be civilian, while the remaining 10 are sworn officers. Officers investigating officers is an inherent conflict of interest. If we are to have true accountability we must progress toward a civilian investigative unit.

13. Would you oppose a SPOG contract that impedes the ability of the City to move police funding to public safety alternatives?

Yes	Yes
No	

Additional Comments	
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- Cities across the country have been creating alternative community-led first response programs, such as [CAHOOTS in Eugene](#) and [STAR in Denver](#). Alternative response teams reduce overreliance on law enforcement by dispatching professionals equipped with the tools necessary to resolve a crisis without creating unnecessary criminal legal system involvement. This creates more equitable outcomes for communities of color and others disproportionately impacted by the criminal legal system.
- The SPOG contract has been repeatedly cited as one of the major obstacles to implementing a similar alternative response program in Seattle.

14. Do you support eliminating in-uniform off duty work for officers?

Yes	Yes
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No	
Additional Comments	

- Allowing in-uniform off-duty work creates confusion among the public and fails to establish clear boundaries of professional work. The added hours over and above the officer's work as a police officer lead to fatigue, which increases the effect of racial bias on decision-making and has detrimental consequences to our community, especially Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.

Part II – Free Response Questions

What is your idea of public safety? What are tangible ways to measure progress toward this goal?

A more community-focused approach to community safety in Seattle would prioritize building trust between law enforcement and the community, investing in prevention and intervention strategies, and addressing the root causes of crime to create safer, more just communities for all residents.

We can accomplish this through several methods. My plan revolves around addressing the root causes of public safety while updating our crisis response services to modern standards. We need community policing and alternatives to traditional police, such as unarmed social workers who can perform wellness checks. We need to support victims of crime while engaging the community in crime prevention. The concept of eyes on the street comes to mind where the more people we have interacting with their local community and walking around within it, the less likely crime is. Ultimately it comes down to addressing root causes such as poverty, lack of access to basic services, and behavioral health issues. The approach needs to be multifaceted but we need to stop crime before it happens not afterwards.

Where do you see gaps and shortfalls in our current public safety system, and what do you propose to address these?

The most glaring gap in our safety services is a lack of an unarmed response unit focused on dealing with mental health issues and basic disputes. A social worker trained in mental health response is far more effective than an armed officer at calming someone down who may be in a manic state. A social worker trained in conflict resolution would be a better option for responding to a dispute between neighbors. The vast majority of public safety concerns not only can be solved without violence but are better off when there is no means of escalation.

The 2012 Consent Decree may be ending soon. While overall rates of use of force have decreased since 2012, racial bias has not. Black people remain seven times more likely than white people to be the subject of police force. There were over 19,000 complaints filed against police action at demonstrations in 2020. In total, 40% of Seattle Police Department employees had at least one complaint filed against them. What further changes need to be made to address these issues?

The Seattle Police Department does not have enough oversight because policing and the systems governing policing haven't changed. The elected officials in this city remain beholden to police because of their power in local government and many of the regulatory bodies the city uses for oversight are staffed by former police or people who have worked closely with law enforcement. The system is a continuation of the police on the street who let their racial bias decide how they enforce the law. We need a complete overhaul of the system and we need to reallocate funding to services that work until the reality of law enforcement changes.

To realize your vision of public safety in Seattle, what kinds of alternative responses and prevention measures are you interested in pursuing?

As mentioned previously, I would focus on alternatives to police and community policing. An engaged, friendly, and social neighborhood is a safe one. When people are paranoid and distrust their neighbors it fosters a lack of faith. We need to instill faith in each other in our neighborhoods again and we need services that can do that.

What are your budget priorities?

My budget priorities are expanding the jumpstart tax, expanding initiatives like I-135, reallocating police funding to other public safety concerns, and creating funding for housing and transit. Wealth is abundant in this city but it is not distributed fairly. I aim to change that.]'

I affirm that all the information provided in response to this questionnaire is true, complete, and correct to the best of my ability, and that no relevant matter has been omitted.

Signature

ChrisTiana ObeySumner

Date: 7/17/23

Printed Name

ChrisTiana ObeySumner