

## Habitat for Humanity and KCLT Copy of April Barker Response

Thank you for having us and the opportunity to ...

I apologize in advance. I need to be to Western by 130 so if I'm not able to answer some of the questions here. Please call or email and I will respond. I have shared a hard copy of my statement with John Moon and can share a pdf if that is helpful.

I'm April Barker—Bellingham City Council Member and candidate for Mayor of Bellingham—because I am a leader, a bridge builder, and I get things done.

I have been working for the people of Bellingham for the last four years and have talked with thousands of voters at their doors. I hear you Bellingham, business as usual is not working!

I bring a fresh perspective and relationships with a diverse group of today's leaders needed to hit the ground running as Mayor of Bellingham 2020.

I usually prefer not to read a statement. However, in this case you have taken the time develop and share your questions ahead of time, thank you, and in order to thoughtfully address each of your concerns, I will be reading my response today.

Here in Bellingham more than 50% of people are housing cost burdened and **yes this constitutes a housing crisis.**

**The major contributing factors are:** Change in public sentiment - with folks wanting to move closure to opportunity and that's typically in the urban core increasing competition for an already deficient housing stock. Technology advancements, allowing folks with tremendous amounts of resources to move here and who are not dependent on the wages of Bellingham. Also a trend across America in the 1980's to nearly stopped the production of the missing middle housing types (duplexes, town homes like what you are building today) creating a huge gap in **our housing continuum** that is needed for folks' economic upward mobility. Historically lower wages here in Whatcom County that haven't kept up with the cost of living, a cumbersome permitting process and layers of rules that contradict each other have also added to this housing crisis.

Specifically for us here in Bellingham, we have a **lot of plans but we haven't done the heavy lifting of making sure those plans can pencil into projects.** Our plans call for these missing middle types and account for densities in our residential zoning that are not attainable with our current rules. For decades we haven't addressed this and many of our multifamily residential zones are being built out as single family detached homes - not multifamily. A deeper dive has shown our rules are extremely complex, for instance we have 92 sub area zones that require a minor thesis to understand what you

can build on any particular lot of multifamily residential and many folks simply give up and build a single family home, cementing a density loss for decades to come. In some instances our rules don't support the densities we have planned - for example a 5000 sq ft lot may be zoned for a duplex but require 3000sq ft per unit, causing expensive processes for the property owner to take on, to do exactly what our plans call for. Business as usual is not working! As your Council member in 2017 I called for leaving no stone unturned in finding more missing middle housing types, I received 6-1 support from the Council. One of the outcomes is making sure our residential multi rules actually support our plans and goals. Another is to simplify our urban village plans (where much of our housing is being built). These both will be in front of the Planning Commission soon.

My policy priorities are rooted in community, fairness and environment. As your City Council Member, I have been committed to making sure that Bellingham has a diverse housing to match our growingly diverse population in every neighborhood across Bellingham. I worked with staff and Council to add language in the comprehensive plan that supports this vision. My work as a Council member has laid a trail of policies and direction for the next Mayor that support the variety and density of housing we need to navigate our way out of this housing crisis.

**The role I envision for non-profit, low- and middle-income housing producers is very hands on, informing our practices and policies to make sure we get the housing built that matches the wages and fixed incomes we have in Bellingham. Upon taking office I will get to work hand selected transition team of folks who are knowledgeable and experienced in the housing finance and development sectors. We will define our housing goals for my term as your Mayor and develop game plan of how to get there. Once we have determined that, these folks will continue as part of a Mayor's housing advisory team that my staff and I will meet regularly to gain feedback on how we are doing and where we need to course correct to make sure we are supporting housing producers.**

As your mayor I will be working with staff to ensure our regulations allow for innovation, eliminate waste and reduce variability. This will **uncomplicate the process and eliminate unnecessary costs** for housing producers. As your Mayor, I will make it clear with my staff that more housing units is the goal and in cases where **my staff discretion in a policy they will lean toward the path that decreases cost and production time.** I will also work with staff to develop an **audit mechanism for permitting** to give us a better picture of the timing and efficiency of delivering our permits. I will do the heavy lifting of bringing forward policy suggestions for the Council to **ensure our zoning and rules support the variety and density of to build our housing continuum** and meet our Comprehensive plan goals. Most importantly I will make sure the **folks who are**

**responsible for getting the product to market are involved in the process along the way.**

Land use is a very emotional and political topic. It plays a very important role in making sure that the folks who make Bellingham work can afford to live in Bellingham! I'm not one to back away from a challenge or shy away from making hard decisions. That is why folks across cultures and sectors asked me to run for Mayor. This is why I partnered with today's community leaders to develop the Whatcom Housing Alliance, which will also play a very important role in my term as Mayor informing policy direction and working to build the political will to get where we need to go. The organization needs sustainable funding and I will work with our partners and the County Executive to **deliver the resources needed to support the organization** invaluable work.

For those who are working to bring permanently affordable housing, I will work within the current budget and if necessary bring forward a budget request for the Council's approval to have **affordable/workforce housing navigator** to follow and assist the developer as he/she navigates the City's processes across departments. This will not only help to fast track housing construction; it will also give valuable feedback to our departments and Mayor's Housing Advisory Team on what is working and what isn't working.

As your Mayor I will be committed to creating a culture and environment in City Hall that **supports housing producers that can help us reach our goals of supporting housing types that grow the housing continuum**. I will be working tirelessly to make sure that we are doing the heavy political lifts of ensuring our policies, practices and rules match our plans.

As your Council Member, I recognized we were so busy fighting over what type of house could be allowed where and **we lost site of the people** who would be inhabiting those homes. That is why I developed the concept of the **housing equity assessment** that I'm working as your Council Member to complete by the end of this year. It looks at the wages and fixed incomes we have, determines what types of homes those wages can afford and where those homes need to be located to ensure all parts of Bellingham are accessible to all income levels. **These are the parts of the housing continuum that we are missing**. However, even if we get these built to be market rate affordable today, the pressures we spoke about earlier will cause them to quickly become unaffordable tomorrow.

This is why the assessment also calls for the Council to work with the community to determine the percentage of **permanently affordable housing** for those wages and fixed incomes to make sure our **housing continuum** is complete for years to come. This

will be a very important tool for the next Mayor to get us through this housing crisis. I'm committed to making sure Folks who make Bellingham work can afford to live in Bellingham.

Ways I will be working to support the development of the housing beyond City Hall is to partner with our financial institutions, foundations and community members to create **access to low cost capital** for projects that are working to build permanently affordable housing to meet our housing assessment goals. I have a great relationship with Whatcom Community Foundation and have spoken with Mauri about ways our community can continue to support the **threshold fund**. This fund has cultivated capital access for the telegraph project we were working on today and can help other developers working to bring permanently affordable housing online.

However, this fund requires folks participating to have substantial investment portfolios that not all of us have in order to participate. I support the foundations direction to broaden the scope of those who can invest and provide access to the much-needed capital. This will be in the form of a **Social Investment/Community Development Fund** that gives **everyday community members like you and me** - a low risk option to invest what we can afford into this fund - get small return and support the production of permanently affordable housing. It's a win - win.

Thank you for taking the time to address these very important issues and your commitment to honor the people who make Bellingham work by ensuring they will always be able to afford to live here.

Visit [AprilBarker.com](http://AprilBarker.com) to learn more and commit to voting April Barker for Bellingham Mayor and let's get started!