

Janelle Cass Edmonds City Council Position No. 2

1. Do you favor a regional or a local approach to addressing issues such as housing and homelessness? If your answer is “a regional approach”, do you hold fast to that answer even where regional solutions such as a push for a massive increase in urbanized density, incentives and tax breaks to developers shift the tax burden to residents, including seniors and those on fixed incomes? How would you intend to listen to citizens and protect the character and fragile environment of our city from competing regional interests?

If you favor a local approach, how will you “protect the character and fragile environment of our city” and counter the shifting of tax burden from developers to Edmonds citizens while ensuring a policy that reasonably increases housing availability?

While the Growth Management Act (GMA) has mandated that cities like Edmonds create plans to accommodating a certain proportion of anticipated regional growth, it is clear that this planning should be focused on what works for Edmonds. The planning process must identify and protect critical areas of concern such as habitat, wetlands, flood areas, and geologically unstable areas. Given that Edmonds has many green spaces, unique geological and infrastructure limitations and that is already has a level of density, there is little room for densification without huge risk to single family zoning. As a council member, I will stand against any rezoning of single-family neighborhoods. This is clearly what the residents want and the Council needs to listen to the people. Furthermore, it is important to note that Edmonds has been on track to meet or exceed GMA goals so we should take our time to garner much more community input on any planning and zoning changes.

While housing affordability is of great concern, the market forces and low interest rates and inflation are all economic factors that cannot be solved by Edmonds government. Reducing inventory of older single-family homes in exchange for brand new multifamily townhomes or triplexes has not proven to reduce cost of housing. Ballard and shoreline are examples of this. Furthermore, adding multifamily homes at the peak of the market that are taxed deferred for developers and future residents is extremely unfair to the current residents of Edmonds and is especially detrimental to our seniors. I would not support any more these types of deals to developers. I would be a proponent of cleaning up our building codes in order to streamline permitting to reduce the cost of construction.

2. Edmonds’ government seems to have devolved into an unelected staff and City Attorney more frequently proposing and even advocating for legislation. Few even reside in the City by which they are employed. Should unelected staff have a heightened level of influence and power in creating legislation? How should that be managed and where should Edmonds’ citizens fit into that legislative process?

It seems inevitable that City employees become our subject matter experts and perform writing or editing of codes for council to consider. A good example of this is the recent discussion of storm water code updates. However, City Council must be the voice of what the people of Edmonds want and not just go along with City Hall. At a recent city council meeting, I noted that very few if any of the council members took notes during the public comment period and I

became disappointed that public comments feel un-acknowledged. As a city council member, I would absolutely prioritize the input of Edmonds residents over that of city employees and find a way to indicate consideration of public comments. To ward off the overstepping or over burdening of City Staff I would propose doing something similar to the Port of Edmonds. They begin each meeting reading their mission statement. This keeps the group moving as a team and serving focused on serving their constituents. As a council member, I would advocate for that as well as periodic reminders of the roles and responsibilities of staff versus elected officials.

3. RCW 36.70A.140 requires a city with a Comprehensive Plan to ensure “continuous public participation in the development and amendment of comprehensive land use plans and development regulations...” In contravention of this law Edmonds government has been lacking in how citizens are engaged in its “consideration and response to public comments”. (RCW 36.70.140) Examples include Citizen Housing Commission polls written with predetermined outcomes, poll outcomes being discounted when the results did not conform to a certain agenda and a refusal to read aloud public comments submitted in writing to Council meetings against the spirit and intent of the Governor’s Proclamation 20-28 which states that any virtual public meeting “(b) provides the ability for all persons attending the meeting to hear each other at the same time.” What will you do as a Council member to ensure continuous public participation in a genuine and transparent manner?

As a council woman, I would work with the other council members to understand the difference between accurate input and data versus bias data. I would then propose a data integrity clause to our code of conduct; stating that as representatives of the people we will not make decisions on surveys created with pre-decisional questioning.

While the relatively quick adaptation of virtual City Council meetings was impressive and, in some way, made watching the meetings more accessible, it did fall short in a couple ways. The public participants should have had the choice to be seen, or at least their name seen on a secondary zoom page. Furthermore, emailed comments for public comment should have been read out loud for everyone to hear. Because it looks like the hybrid model of Council meetings will be the way forward, I would propose this modification to procedure.

4. Rank the following issues in order of your priority for Edmonds. Detail your ideas about how to address each of the top three. Please be specific.

1. Public Safety – First thing is first; we need to hire a Chief of Police. So far Edmonds has wasted over \$120K searching and 18 months of time and we still don’t have a police chief. Then we need to ensure that funding is sufficient for hiring more officers to back fill the officers lost due attrition. As a council member, to really shore up public safety, I would advocate for an update to the Edmonds Comprehensive Emergency Response plan to include joint agency and organizational training. We did just go through a disaster with the pandemic, but let’s remember that we also live in an earth quake zone and have a major rail line passing through our city carrying hazardous materials. The question needs to be asked “Why has the city been un able to fill the disaster preparedness manager position?” Having an updated plan and a disaster preparedness manager are fundamental to protecting the safety of Edmonds.

2. Protection of the Environment –My degree is in Civil/Environmental Engineering from the United States Air Force Academy. I have worked protecting people and the environment from a variety of chemical, biological and radiological hazards in both the Air Force and the Federal Aviation Administration. Like so many residents of Edmonds, I cherish our environment. We have many streams and storm water outfalls that flow into the Puget Sound as well as the Waste Water Treatment facility who's treated effluent also goes into the Sound. Edmonds has a great responsibility to keep this water clean. Sadly, improper, development and densification reduce pervious areas contributing to more storm water runoff and damage to Edmonds' streams as well as causing flooding into people's homes. This is what happened with Perinville Creek. As a city council member, I will bring my experience of working collaboratively with stake holders, such as Tribal Nations, residents, engineers and public agencies find the best solutions to problems like this.
3. Economic Development – I am a small business owner in Edmonds and an Edmonds Chamber of Commerce Board of Director. The health of our business community is extremely important and as a community we need to ensure that there is room for economic opportunities. As a council member, I would work to protect commercial zoning from being consumed by residential developers. Keeping commercial space and attracting new robust businesses with high paying jobs would be the best way to balance the housing affordability equation. This will also help to ensure options for people to live/work here in Edmonds further reinforcing our sense of community.
4. Affordable Housing
5. Equity and Inclusion