

Candidate Questionnaire on Housing Issues

2022



Anita Gaul

City/Town: Marshall

Legislative District: SD 15

Party: DFL

Candidate responses in italics.

1. In July 2021, a [national poll](#) found that 68% of the public believes that elected officials are not paying enough attention to the rising cost of housing and ensuring everyone can afford a place to live. **What do you believe is the role of government in ensuring everyone has a place to call home?**

This is difficult issue. It is made even more difficult by the wildly hot housing market we are currently experiencing. I think one thing government can do is offer financial incentives (perhaps in the form of tax breaks) to builders/contractors/companies to invest in or build affordable housing. Another possible option is to offer low-interest loans/mortgages to lower-income or first-time homebuyers.

2. Nearly all counties in Minnesota (92%) are not able to provide sufficient shelter or temporary housing to those who are homeless. **What will you do to end homelessness?**

Based on what I've read, many of those who experience homelessness are in that situation due to drug addictions and/or mental health issues. Therefore, one way to ease homelessness (perhaps not end it, but at least alleviate the problem) is to increase state funding for mental health services and drug rehabilitation/addiction programs.

3. Emergency rental assistance keeps people stably housed, as we saw with federal pandemic-related funding. Historically, nonpayment of rent is the most common reason landlords evict their tenants. During times of financial crisis, families without access to financial resources may be displaced, evicted, or even become homeless. **What will you do to prevent evictions?**

I would need to research the programs currently in place to prevent evictions to determine the right course of action here. Are there enough programs in place, or are more needed? Are the programs that are already in place adequately funded? Which programs have a track record of success in preventing

evictions and which could be re-evaluated or redesigned for better effectiveness? My approach is to first do the research, then propose new policies/programs or changes.

4. Minnesota's housing crisis disproportionately harms families of color, especially Black and Indigenous households. Minnesota is one of the worst states in the nation for racial disparities in homeownership. Additionally, 58 percent of Black renters are paying more than they can afford on housing costs. **What meaningful steps will you take to eliminate racial disparities in housing?**

One possible solution to this program is to increase state funding for housing assistance to non-white applicants. Another possible solution is to increase state funding for housing construction on tribal lands in the state. This is a systemic problem that defies a "one size fits all" approach and will take time to dismantle.

5. There are approximately 170,000 renter households in the state that earn less than \$31,200 per year. But rental assistance is only available to one out of every four income-qualifying households. Even though more than 100,000 lowest income households need homes, the state only supports the production of 100 homes each year for these families. **What will you do to support the housing needs of those at the lowest income level in Minnesota?**

It seems that the state needs to do better in funding rental assistance programs. Perhaps these programs also need to be re-examined for effectiveness -- are we creating too many barriers that prevent people who need rental assistance from accessing it?

6. Energy efficiency improvements in multifamily buildings and weatherizing single family homes improve indoor air quality, eliminate drafts, and protect residents from extreme cold and heat—delivering health benefits and lower health care costs. **What strategies do you support to improve housing conditions and reduce utility costs?**

I think offering incentives (again, perhaps in the form of tax breaks) is a good strategy to encourage people to make energy efficient improvements or to build energy efficient structures. Encouraging people to do things in a more environmentally-friendly way is best done by offering carrots (such as financial incentives) rather than threatening them with sticks (such as financial penalties).

7. Minnesota's home values are increasing rapidly, constraining low- and middle-income families from achieving affordable homeownership, including more than 64,000 households of color. **What steps will you take to increase opportunities for renters to purchase homes, condos, or cooperative ownership models?**

Again, I think one possible solution is for the state to offer low-interest loans/mortgages to lower-income or first-time homebuyers.

8. Including the recommendations of the community when developing policies and programs is a best practice for effective and lasting solutions. **How will you include those most impacted by housing needs in developing and implementing housing solutions?**

When proposed legislation comes across my desk, it is important to seek the input of all stakeholders. I would simply call those who would be impacted by a specific bill/law and ask their opinion on it. I would invite them to a meeting. I would meet them over coffee. It's important to hear everyone's perspective on an issue, particularly those who would be directly impacted.