

# Candidate Questionnaire on Housing Issues

# 2022



## Heather Gustafson

**City/Town:** White Bear Lake

**Legislative District:** SD36

**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?**

*A home is a safe place for someone to live and maintain residence. It is critical for everyone to have access to a stable home. I am a strong advocate for affordable and quality housing for all people, regardless of their age, race, gender, etc. I believe that the government has the systematic power to work with community members, non-profits, and private landlords to ensure a fair and equitable system. Everyone deserves a safe home to return to at the end of their day. The government can mediate between landlords and tenants to ensure that corporations and private landlords do not unfairly profit off of the lives of other human beings.*

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?**

*Homelessness is a complex crisis that affects many Minnesotans. There are a number of proposed solutions within the realm of housing policy, and there is an opportunity to address the high cost of living and the current level of inflation. I believe that in order to effectively end homelessness we need to examine policy at a broader level to ensure the health and well-being of Minnesotans. We do need more options for affordable housing, but the problem goes deeper than that. I believe that it is the responsibility of the MN Legislature to reexamine how our state funds and oversees the variety of housing options. It is critical that our government also addresses the effects of inflation, price gouging, and increasing healthcare costs on the lives on Minnesotans in order to end the housing crisis.*

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?**

*Many Minnesotans live in economic distress, with the majority of their income going towards the cost of housing. This means that one crisis – a significant healthcare bill or a lost job can lead to homelessness. I believe that we need to require landlords and mortgage holders to give adequate notice of intent to evict, so that individuals and families can prepare for their future. Additionally, it is critical for us to examine the potential for emergency loan programs to prevent evictions. By ensuring Minnesotans have access to a safe and quality home, we are reducing crime, improving educational opportunities, and supporting the health and well-being of our neighbors.*

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?**

*Historically, housing policy and systems in the United States have disproportionately benefited white families. In Minnesota, there is a lot that can be done to eliminate racial disparities in housing. I would support targeted programs to assist first-time homebuyers and uplift our neighbors who have been unable to afford housing costs.*

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?**

*I will advocate for policies and programs that support the housing needs of those at the lowest income level in Minnesota. First off, I will work to create a plan for rent stabilization to ensure Minnesotans have access to housing. Our lowest income households are often renters who are subjected to landlords increasing the cost of rent at rapid rates. I will also work to ensure that there is an adequate amount of affordable housing options throughout the state to address the homelessness crisis.*

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?**

*When touring the Sheet Metal Workers Training Center in White Bear Lake, I learned a lot about the importance of keeping HVAC systems in good condition to improve energy efficiency. I am interested in working with the trades to create a state ventilation certification to ensure the health and well-being of Minnesotans while also promoting efficient energy usage across the state.*

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?**

*I believe that creating low interest home loans for qualifying incomes will increase the opportunity for low- and middle-income families to access homeownership opportunities. I am also interested in learning more about the development of cooperative ownership models and how they affect the market for affordable housing.*

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?**

*I am committed to building relationships with people throughout our community. The time I have spent door knocking and speaking directly with my neighbors has highlighted the most important issues Minnesotans are facing. When elected, I will continue to engage in conversations directly with my constituents – by hosting town halls, round table discussions, and being present and available at community events. I will also partner with local organizations and our municipal governments to create effective and lasting housing solutions for our community.*