

Candidate Questionnaire on Housing Issues

2022



John Hest

City/Town: Glyndon

Legislative District: HD 4B

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?**

The first role of government is providing a safety net for those who need a little help. It is becoming increasingly difficult, particularly in rural communities like my own, to find affordable housing whether rented or owned. I support government efforts to keep down the cost of housing including the promotion of home ownership and efforts to build more affordable housing. I would love to see a loan program where municipalities could get loans from the state to build affordable housing for their communities. With a \$9+ billion surplus there is no reason why we can't help every Minnesotan find a safe, affordable home.

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 huge problem in Minnesota and one that few rural areas have done enough to combat. Everyone should have a safe place to call home. I support additional investments in our shelters and transitional housing to help Minnesotans make the move from homelessness to housed; I'd love to see that targeted at municipalities since I think they generally know the needs of their communities better than St. Paul. I also support investments in our mental health care system and support personnel in our schools which can hopefully work on some of the issues that cause people to become homeless in the first place. I've also been talking about veterans' homelessness since the start of my campaign and I support additional dollars for our veterans' homes and veterans services to ensure those who served are getting the support they need. I don't think there's one silver bullet solution to ending homelessness (although wouldn't that be nice?) but I do think there are targeted investments we can make that help get people into housing.

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?**

Minnesota is far too friendly to landlords and hostile to renters. The easiest way to prevent evictions is to ensure that renters are able to keep up with their rent, including by passing an increased minimum wage, ensuring fairness in taxation including cutting Social Security income taxes and providing additional tax credits for childcare and student loan payments, increasing the number of available jobs, ensuring access to affordable childcare and healthcare, and educating renters about the many local, state, and federal rental assistance programs available to them. I would also want to reexamine the laws around evictions to ensure that renters have due process and sufficient time to make other arrangements.

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?**

While Minnesota excels in many areas, racial disparities in areas like education, employment, and, yes, housing remain immense. The homeownership gap is particularly concerning given that we well know the importance of homeownership in building generational wealth. I support expansions of programs like Minnesota's first-time homebuyer program as well as education about great federal programs through HUD, USDA, etc. to encourage homeownership; with help from a USDA Rural Development loan, I was able to purchase my home with little cost up front and I'd love for Minnesotans of color to be able to similarly utilize such programs. I'd love to see a similar first-gen homebuyer program as well. I previously talked about my support for a loan program to fund municipally-developed affordable housing in high-need areas and a generalized increase in the availability of affordable housing would certainly help all Minnesotans.

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?**

Again, I'd love see a loan program that allows municipalities to build more affordable housing rather than relying exclusively on profit-driven private developers. I also support investments in holistic approaches to addressing the housing crisis, including lowering healthcare and childcare costs, investing in

transit and other infrastructure, and other steps that can help reduce other costs to help Minnesotans better afford housing. I also support efforts to help seniors, a particularly vulnerable group often living on a fixed income, stay in their homes and have available senior living options in their home communities if that becomes unfeasible.

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 support investments in everything you've mentioned here. There was a great effort to invest in weatherization efforts last session and I support that bill as well as additional investments in providing low- or no-cost ways for Minnesotans to help weatherize their homes. I'd also love to see more investments in community solar and wind farms and similar lower-cost and lower-carbon electricity generation strategies which will also help reduce utility bills while increasing community and environmental health.

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?**

As someone who grew up a member of a farmers' cooperative, I'm a big fan of cooperative ownership models and I'd love to see additional investments and education in cooperative homeownership models, rather than relying on the largesse of the landlord class. As I previously mentioned, I love Minnesota's first-time homebuyer program and some of the available federal programs but I would also support a first-generation homebuyer program where we help Minnesotans whose parents didn't own their homes to own their own home and start building generational wealth. We also need to work to encourage municipalities and/or private developers to build more affordable housing rather than just building low-quality rental properties or high-dollar single-family homes.

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?**

For one, I would intend to partner with you all since you work more directly with those populations. But, generally, my philosophy in governance is one of collaboration and constant input gathering. That's one reason why I'm so committed to doorknocking as part of my electoral strategy, besides the obvious political advantages. When I knock on someone's door, I'm going to

get their unvarnished experiences and feelings and that's irreplaceable in formulating a legislative agenda. Time after time on the doors, I hear from folks who desperately wanted to live in their hometown but were forced by cost and housing availability to move to a bigger town or whose parents wanted to find senior housing in their rural community but were unable and had to move to Fargo, Minneapolis, etc. When I'm developing solutions, I want everyone impacted by the relevant problems at the table and the area of affordable housing is no different.