

Candidate Questionnaire on Housing Issues

2022



Matt Norris

City/Town: Blaine

Legislative District: HD32B

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?**

Everyone deserves a safe, affordable place to call home, and government should play a role in helping those who are struggling to find one. In this land of abundance, no one should go homeless. I know many in our district who are distressed by the increasingly frequent sight of homeless individuals at busy intersections. Minnesota can do better. As a legislator, I'll support policies that increase access to supportive housing for those transitioning out of homelessness, bring the dream of buying a first home more in reach, and allow seniors to age in place.

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?**

We should take a housing-first approach to help those who are already homeless and offer preventative assistance to those who are facing potential homelessness. The majority of adults experiencing homelessness have chronic physical and mental health challenges, and an even larger majority faced adverse childhood experiences. To truly address homelessness, we need to take a holistic approach.

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?**

Preventing evictions begins with strengthening every Minnesotan's economic outlook and pocketbook. That's why I support expanding the Job Training Incentive Program, making more low-income Minnesotans eligible for the Working Family Credit, and making healthcare more affordable. In addition, we should increase access to rental assistance programs to provide a short-term bridge to avoid eviction.

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?**

We should be building on the success of programs like those offered by the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, which in 2021 provided direct home-buying and rental assistance to 43,000 households of color. We're also losing far too much naturally occurring affordable housing to redevelopment and out-of-state corporate ownership, which drives up costs and availability.

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?**

We should be removing barriers to rental assistance and encouraging development of homes at all price levels, including the most affordable. We should also increase funding for rental assistance. As they say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We should direct resources to preventing homelessness in the first place rather than dealing with its costly consequences.

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?**

This is an opportunity for smart investment, as healthier buildings not only benefit our residents in the long run, but renovations for energy-efficiency and air quality also provide high-quality jobs for tradespeople in the near term.

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?**

Blaine has more manufactured homes than any other city in the seven-county metro area, and I fully support cooperative ownership models that allow residents to own the parks where they live. We should also increase access to first-time homebuyer assistance programs.

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've been involved with public service for the past 17 years and have a track record of responding to community needs. For example, at the start of the pandemic, I heard from families served by the afterschool program I ran that what they really needed was computers for distance learning. I was able to get more than 1,300 Chromebooks into the hands of students who needed them. I'll bring this same responsive, stakeholder-focused approach to my work in the Legislature. As an elected official, I also plan to hold regular town halls in Blaine and Lexington to offer those impacted by housing needs an opportunity to share their concerns directly.