

Jon,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to pertinent issues facing our community and our culture. Without the constraint of a questionnaire or word limits, I find that I have filled several pages with thoughts and opinions.

I welcome follow-up and questions from your membership or others regarding my comments here or other issues relevant to our community.

I appreciate the work of Olympia Indivisible. Thank you for your help in providing information to the public which supports the electoral process.

With best regards,
Nathaniel Jones

Homelessness - Our community understanding of homelessness is growing rapidly as the number of homeless people and the severity of their situation continues to worsen. In our community, the term “homeless people” often refers to the destitute and vulnerable folks who can be found in Downtown Olympia or in urban encampments on the edge of neighborhoods.

There is also a larger context of homelessness represented by the 1,700 children in Thurston County public schools who do not have an address. These K-12 kids suggest that homelessness in our community includes thousands of adults who have fallen out the bottom of the economy and cannot afford basic necessities.

Data is scant but we do know that local eviction rates have substantially increased, that requests for services are up, and that families comprise roughly 34% of the national homeless population. The vast majority of these families are headed by a single woman.

Olympia’s work to establish a sanctioned encampment in downtown is seeing some success. People are stabilizing, some are getting jobs, and some are moving into housing. This progress is slow but meaningful. Regional coordination for a joint stabilization site is progressing, with the County Commissioners approving a new temporary-housing ordinance last week and the creation of a new multi-jurisdictional housing council. With time and effort, I hope to see more capacity in a regional stabilization system.

One of the greatest impediments to re-housing is the soaring cost of rent in our community. Our vacancy rate is about 2.7%. Supply and demand have conspired to increase rental rates by about 50% in the past five years, while wages have increased by about 3.2% during the same period.

Comprehensive responses are needed. Our community must build more homes, create pathways out of homelessness, and support living-wage jobs for our people.

Environmental Stewardship - Like most older communities, Olympia is dealing with legacy pollution that presents threats to the environment and human health. This problem is focused on downtown, our marine shorelines, and Budd Inlet, but can be found in other areas of town. Cleanup is costly and slow. This year's tragic release of PCBs from the Tumwater Brewery District reminds us that legacy contaminants take many forms and preventative actions are needed.

The historic impoundment of the Deschutes River restricts adequate flushing of Budd Inlet, leading to depleted oxygen and species decline. Restoration is critical, yet it is costly and slow, and will require complex finance and governance systems.

Our stormwater systems collect toxins from roadways and urban landscapes only to release fouled effluent into our waterways and Puget Sound. Drainage culverts restrict fish passage to primordial breeding grounds. And septic systems leach into our groundwater raising damaging nitrogen levels. Response to this threat has been costly and slow.

Greenhouse gas pollution from our community is growing, with a small reduction of per-capita production. New state-wide mandates for renewable electricity are cause for celebration, yet conversion of our transportation systems is still in the realm of science fiction. Energy conservation retrofits are the most cost-effective approach to reduce pollution from our buildings.

Our region has undertaken a hopeful process to identify and prioritize a community-wide response to local climate pollution. We are incrementally retrofitting our stormwater systems. And we are working to address the other identified threats to public and environmental health. There is a great deal to be done. Our task is to continue cleaning up the systems we have inherited while protecting against the introduction of new environmental threats.

Public Safety - Olympians are well served by the City's public safety services. Our Fire Department provides excellent response times, customer service, and quality care. Their work is dangerous, their equipment is well maintained but aging, and their leadership is moving through anticipated but uncertain succession.

Our Police Department has seen a dramatic and continuing turnover of personnel due to retirements and injuries. This has allowed the command structure to build the current team with expanded training in critical incidents, de-escalation, and inherent bias. Both Police and Fire

are models for all-gender inclusivity. Although these are traditionally male-dominated careers, Olympia is a leader in inclusion.

I am proud to have led the November 2017 public safety ballot measure because the suite of services resulting from that election were non-traditional, highly effective investments. The walking patrol, the crisis response unit, the “familiar faces initiative, and neighborhood liaison program were not “just more cops on the beat”. That were well-conceived services that fit our community.

While I am up-beat about the changes I have seen in OPD, I am not naive to the tensions and anxieties inherent in modern policing. Public distrust is fueled by simmering questions about Bryson Chaplin and Andre Thompson, Yvonne McDonald, Vanessa Hopson, and other people involved in tragic and unresolved incidents. Olympia is not immune to the horrific abuse of power and racial bias we have seen played out across the country. Police accountability and public scrutiny are critical elements of successful public safety services.

Economic Development - Olympia’s principal industries are state government and medical services. These major engines of employment and economic activity are followed by local public services, such as teachers and municipal workers. While these industries are generally more stable and dependable than traditional private industries, Olympia lacks the sort of entrepreneurial opportunity that can raise wages and fuel needed investments in infrastructure, schools, and community development.

As a board member of the Economic Development Council and the Regional Planning Council I appreciate that our community is not chasing after a sugar-daddy industry for recruitment. Rather, our approach is to grow-our-own economy by investing in our strengths and building economic partnerships.

The brewery and distilling initiative is an example of looking at our assets and putting them to use - our agricultural capacity, our educational infrastructure, our transportation networks, and our financial institutions have found alignment and early success.

Another grow-your-own initiative is the move to build upon our arts and cultural resources for economic benefit and jobs. Our status as a state capitol with a distinct history and culture provide us with opportunities that other communities can only dream of. We are working to bring more benefit from this potential.

Finally, we are missing a significant opportunity for economic development because our Port has not innovated well. There is tremendous opportunity for community benefit through joint initiatives, yet to date, these are mostly opportunities lost. I celebrate the Hands-On Museum, the Farmers' Market, and other initiatives, but these should be a prelude to far more significant partnerships in locally grown jobs and opportunity.

Growth Management - My graduate work was in community and regional planning. I believe in growth management as a central tool for creating the community systems we need now and in the future. There is a common understanding that sprawl is detrimental to the environment and to the economy. We have adopted goals to protect agricultural lands and timber lands because we understand their value. We know that public services and infrastructure are far more cost effective within compact communities. And we know that climate resiliency demands greater urbanization.

We have adopted goals that call for compact growth in mixed-use centers and urbanized corridors. We are seeing investment in multi-family housing in our downtown, but this has been a long time coming. So far, we are seeing very little growth in other designated locations, except Briggs Village on Henderson and Merritt Manor on Martin Way.

I support the recent changes that encourage in-fill development in single-family neighborhoods, although the City's rollout of the initiative was quite awkward. Many folks across the community remain confused about the changes and wonder whether they should trust city leadership. I continue to field questions about the relationship between the Missing Middle initiative and how it will or will not encourage housing affordability. This tells me that the City can do better.

Transportation - I spent most of my career as a transportation systems and facility planner, working to develop public transit at the local level in metropolitan cities. I cannot overstate the importance of coordination between transportation and land use planning and the value of balance between jobs and housing within a community.

Today, Olympia is an employment hub, with people across the region commuting in for work state offices or our medical facilities. Conversely, Thurston County as a whole, is a bedroom for employment opportunities at JBLM or other points north. These flows of commuters are not the result of good planning.

Olympia is currently developing its first Transportation Master Plan. The product of this effort will be a prioritized project list which considers community benefit without pre-screening for mode of transportation. This merit-based selection method is innovative and will yield cost-effective mobility benefits.

There are several constriction points in our transportation network that are the result of topography or early street-system design decisions. If revision becomes practical we may be able to address some of these issues, but generally, the network we have today is likely to remain in place.

Like others, I am looking to optimize new technological improvements in our transportation system. Improvements to system management and controls have early promise. Autonomous and connected vehicles can also provide better service. I am particularly intrigued by concepts which treat transportation as a utility, rather than a facility.

Diversity - Olympia's diversity comes in many forms. I enjoy our community because we are able to celebrate diversity and view our differences as an asset. There are ample examples of behavior in our city where diversity and differences have served as a reason for conflict and even assault. However, the dominant culture in Olympia is one of inclusion and acceptance.

I am particularly interested in issues of equity in Olympia. I want the City of Olympia to provide ombudsman services for community members who have questions or need assistance related to equity matters. I want the Olympia community to lead gender equity for women by addressing matters of domestic violence, child care, child support, sexual harassment, equal compensation, employment opportunity, and the specific needs of gender minorities.