



Kshama Sawant
Seattle City Councilmember

Support Occupy CEHKC's Plan to End Homelessness in Seattle

Housing is an internationally recognized human right. Yet that principle has gained little traction with local policy makers, where last year at least 57 homeless people died in King County because they lacked safe housing. Tragically, the average lifespan of a homeless person in King County has dropped to 48 years of age, and this year the annual One Day Count showed a 14% increase in homelessness. Our shelters regularly report they have to turn people away. The "Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness" is not meeting its targets. "Occupy CEHKC" formed to make sure that the Committee to End Homelessness in King County (CEHKC) reconsiders its general strategy with both immediate survival needs and long-term housing solutions in mind.

The root causes of homelessness are many. The so-called 'recovery' that followed the Great Recession did not create prosperity for most working people. While Fortune 500 corporations bounced back, the skilled jobs that were lost did not return. Those driven to the service sector have to deal with underemployment, low wages and a financial and political system which barely acknowledges them. Meanwhile, thousands of Seattle residents remain at risk and unemployed as they seek regular work. For many, it remains a losing battle.

At the same time, the cost of housing in Seattle is skyrocketing. While landlords charge increasingly exorbitant rents, bank-owned properties sit empty and ill-maintained. Developers exploit both sides of this equation by flipping formerly accessible real estate for speculative purposes or investing in the development of luxury units that remain far beyond the means of the average worker.

All of these trends have led to an increasingly unequal distribution of wealth and resources in our community that has caused deepening poverty and the neglect of the human right to housing and basic resources. It is appropriate that those who benefitted from this inequality – big businesses, speculators and the super-rich – be the ones taxed to pay for emergency measures. First we must increase our support for those that are already fighting homelessness by:

- Extending winter only shelters to year-round operations. A recent successful example of this can be seen in the expansion of WHEEL's Low Barrier Winter Women's Shelter services. They launched a grassroots campaign to save their shelter. City Government, Service Organizations, and Religious Groups all responded with necessary resources to keep the shelter open throughout this year.
- Ensuring encampments that are safe, sanitary and good neighbors are strengthened with public support and resources. Self-managed encampments are a dignified, quick and cost effective way to keep homeless people together and safe who would otherwise be alone and at risk. They have flexible and easy entry and will continue to be the last line of defense for many people still homeless. Tent City 3, Nickelsville, and the Safe Parking Program have all had success, but Nickelsville will require a new location by September 1, 2014. The City of Seattle or the Seattle Housing Authority should offer space to meet this need.

City Hall, 600 Fourth Avenue, Floor 2, PO Box 34025, Seattle, Washington 98124-4025
(206) 684-8016, Fax: (206) 684-8587, TTY: (206) 233-0025

E-mail Address: kshama.sawant@seattle.gov Web: <http://www.seattle.gov/council/sawant>

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- Supporting the efforts of the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness to use the former Federal Reserve Building to consolidate and improve services for homeless people in downtown Seattle.

We also must make significant changes to avoid people becoming homeless in the first place by:

- Preventing people from losing their homes through a moratorium on foreclosures and evictions. Reasonable allegations of illegal financial transactions on the part of lenders should be investigated and prosecuted by the City, County and State.
- Explore the development of a municipal bank or partnerships with institutions Boston's Community Capital, which buys underwater mortgages and sells them back to the household at fair market value, should be in place before a foreclosure and eviction moratorium is lifted. The city should end all relations with banks such as Wells Fargo that have a well-established record of treating investments like casino chips when local institutions that do business within the community are available.
- Instituting rent control to stem the rapid rise of rents and protect the diminishing pool of affordable rental housing.
- Engaging in a massive public housing effort to build thousands of affordable houses and apartments throughout the City of Seattle. Every level of government must tax the super-rich and big business to build what is needed to house every human being in our city.

In Solidarity

Kshama Sawant

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