

AFSCME Local 2067 City of Salem Questionnaire

Good afternoon, candidate for Salem City Government, this is the questionnaire that must be filled out and returned prior to interview for endorsement from AFSCME Local 2067, City of Salem.

Please answer the questions to the best of your abilities, should you have any questions or need additional information feel free to reach out to Doug Lantz at dlantz@oregonafscme.org

Interviews will be March 2, 2024 so questionnaires will be due back by midnight on February 16, 2024. Please email the questionnaire to Doug Lantz at dlantz@oregonafscme.org

Your responses will be posted on the local's website.

Your name: Virginia Stapleton

Office for which you are a candidate: Salem City Council – Ward 1

1. **What would your goals and priorities be as city leader?**

Over the past three years, we've made significant progress on so many pressing issues, and I hope to continue that work moving forward. On top of the many responsibilities that come with being a City Councilor, I see three main areas of focus in the coming term: revenue, homelessness, housing, and transportation.

Revenue will be an issue over the coming years, and I'm looking forward to the work the Revenue Task Force is doing and their recommendations. I suspect we may need to go to the voters a couple of times before finding something a majority can support. Then, we will have the implementation process, which, depending on the revenue source, can take some time. I would not be surprised if we face at least two years of cuts before we can start reinvesting in city services.

Finding a way forward in addressing our unhoused crisis will be a strong theme moving into the next term. I'm thankful that the Governor has already helped to fund our existing services, but many, if not all city service areas, will face cuts, including our unsheltered services. We'll need to find a balance between needs and resources in the coming years. Housing will also be a top priority, and I'm committed to finding ways to increase our affordable housing stock and diversify the types of housing across the board.

Transportation will also be top of mind as we update our Transportation Master Plan and work to implement the bond. All these topics will demand in-depth knowledge of the issues and creative problem-solving to move forward. I'm committed to working with my colleagues and the community to find the best path forward.

2. **Give examples of how you've advocated for worker's rights in the past.**

I come from a working-class background. As a teenager and young adult, I worked my way through high school, held several jobs simultaneously, and worked hard to make ends meet. I worked to put my husband through college, and like so many others, struggled through the years with young children.

And although I've never had the privilege of being part of a union, I understand what they bring to the community.

I understand the critical value unions play in ensuring Oregon's frontline workers get a fair shake and are paid an honest wage. Unions gave us the weekend and built the middle class in America. Over the past three years on Council, I've voted to support workers' rights and increased wages. I understand that our AFSCME raises haven't kept pace with inflation, causing turnover and burnout among the remaining overworked staff. We've advocated for management to review wages to ensure they are competitive. In many cases, we increased wages and/or classification for staff. We also listened to staff who needed extra support and advocated with management on their behalf.

When the Council faced a tough decision last year on whether to significantly cut back city positions in our library, parks, police, support services and fire departments, or to look for new revenue, I joined the council majority advocating for keeping us decently staffed through a payroll tax. This is the approach taken by our peer cities. While voters rejected that approach, it was our effort to invest in the City's staff - both in numbers of employees and resources available to maintain competitive pay.

3. Recognizing the value and importance of employee retention, proper training and work/life balance what do you see as your role in improving retention and ensuring that capable employees are attracted to make long careers at the City of Salem?

I believe my dedication to the City's employees has been well-documented, as well as my understanding of the issues. Over the past 20 years, we've cut many positions, often leaving the remaining staff to add more to their workload. We are now at a breaking point where we have been asking staff to do more with less for too long, and they are at a point of burnout. This does not entice people to come work for the city. I am a firm believer in work/life balance and increasing training opportunities to retain our employees and attract more talent. We need a deeper bench of well-qualified and committed employees to ensure the success of the city.

4. Given increasing inflation, projected labor shortages, crumbling infrastructure and expanding issues related to the unsheltered in our city, how would you prioritize conflicts in the City's budget?

I have been advocating for new revenue since 2018 and tried hard to get the city what it needed in order to avoid layoffs this past year. Without the support of the community and its leaders, that measure failed, but not entirely. Because of the work the majority of the Council did this past year, more people in the community know about the financial struggles we face, there is more talk of reforming measures 5 and 50, and we are closer now to payment in lieu of taxes than we ever have been. We are also seeing the Governor direct money to sustain unhoused programs across the state, which will be a huge help. I'm hopeful that this short session will be very productive. Even with payment in lieu of taxes and help with our unsheltered programs, we will need to make significant cuts across all departments; no one group can bear the brunt, and everyone will feel the cuts. My job is to make those cuts as equitably as possible until a revenue option can be found.

5. **We believe that public services should have public oversight, even when that service is being contracted out. How will you ensure there is public oversight of contracted work? What are your thoughts on protecting wages and promoting safety standards of contracted workers?**

There are laws that govern wages and safety standards. I believe in a thriving wage and feel that many of the social strains we experience today are driven by increasing inequity within a flawed system. We must always ensure that safety standards are met and that we keep evaluating what needs to change to ensure the safety of workers and the public.

6. **Why are you interested in our endorsement?**

An endorsement from AFSCME would communicate to the residents of my Ward my commitment to our labor unions. That I recognize the valuable work city staff do on behalf of the residents of Salem and that I'm someone who will fight on their behalf.

7. **What do you want our members to know about you and your plans?**

Serving as the City Councilor for Ward 1 has been an honor and extremely gratifying. Over the past three years, I've learned so much about the amazing people and systems that make this city function - it truly has been an honor. I'm running again to complete the projects I've started and continue to move in the direction this current council has set.

The Transportation Master Plan update will likely be a main focus for me; we are already one year into a three-year process, so there's lots of work to be done there. I helped secure \$2.8 million in funding to advance my motions on the 20 is Plenty program and Vision Zero, which aims to end deaths in our transportation system within the next ten years. I expect that work to start in 2024 and continue over the coming years.

Continuing the amazing work the council has done around housing and helping those in need will continue to be a top priority. I've said this many times in the past but I'll say it again: it took us 40 years to get into this mess, and it will take time to get out. What is needed is a clear objective, which is ending homelessness, a data-driven - scientifically proven response plan, and steady leadership, in order to reach our goal. We've built a system based on those ideals and now we need to continue the good work. Most of our unhoused crisis stems from a lack of housing in general and we've made good strides on that topic but more work is needed. I know that the next few years will be critical for development and my focus has been on infill in our downtown core and underutilized industrial areas.

On a more lighthearted topic, I also want to see more public art around the city, I expect we will make great progress in this area over the coming years. Our Parks Master Plan update is starting and that, along with our work implementing the bond projects, will be important for many generations to come. Our continued efforts to address climate change will be vital to our city and its residents as we move into a more uncertain future. That is a long list of things to accomplish but I am a person of action who thrives when tasked with issues such as these.