

## **Sharon Meieran | Candidate for Multnomah County Chair**

### **1. If elected, what should voters expect to see you deliver in one year and in four years with respect to our crisis of homelessness?**

We are experiencing a humanitarian crisis of unsheltered homelessness that is getting worse, with increasing numbers of people living and dying on our streets, often suffering from serious mental health and/or substance abuse issues. Tens of thousands of people are living on the edge, one medical bill or lost paycheck away from losing their home. We do not have enough housing available that people can afford, or services to support and sustain people in housing once they have it. What services we do have are often not effectively coordinated. There are administrative, operational, and systems barriers at every turn. There is poor data management, a lack of transparency and poor communication with the public. And there is an overarching lack of accountability for how money - hundreds of millions of dollars - is being spent in this system.

To address the issue, my initial focus would be on saving lives and addressing the squalid conditions in which people are living, and the associated public health and safety crises impacting our entire County.

For the longer term I would invest in the rent assistance and the supportive services that we know help people become housed and enable them to sustain that housing. And I would change the internal structures and systems at the County so that they were streamlined, integrated, coordinated and ensured accountability in our contracting and use of taxpayer money.

Some key steps in this process would include:

Establish a crisis task force to come up with a plan to immediately reduce the harm facing people living outside.

Rapidly implement a large-scale alternative shelter continuum that meets a variety of needs at a scale that will improve the health and safety of people living outside, along with the community at large.

Do a "By Name Count" to understand not only how many people are living unsheltered, but who they are, where they are, and what they need. A Point In Time Count is grossly inaccurate and we should be investing in processes and data that can actually advance our work to end homelessness.

Put an effective and transparent advisory and oversight body in place.

Coordinate outreach and crisis services, which currently leave huge gaps in services for many people living outside. We need a plan to identify what is needed where, and provide the right services at the right time in an effective and efficient way.

Restructure the Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS).

Develop a public-facing dashboard with specific goals, timelines and expenditures of the JOHS clearly delineated.

Collect, maintain and effectively use meaningful data.

Change contracting processes to ensure accountability for outcomes.

**2. As costs of County services increase, the County must be intentional in how we generate revenue.**

**a) With respect to taxation, how will you approach who to tax and who to protect?**

Right now earners over certain income levels are paying for two new programs - Preschool for All and the Metro Supportive Housing Services measure. I have heard from many people that the taxes they pay are impacting their ability to pay for their own kids' college, childcare, etc. I believe that, if on "high earners," tax should not introduce hardship.

But what concerns people even more is whether the money is being put to good use and whether they are getting what they pay for. And I have not seen data showing that this is the case for either of the new measures.

**b) What is one place the county could generate revenue without increasing taxes?**

Continue to advocate to state agencies to correct funding formulas for behavioral health, homeless services, public health, transportation and infrastructure.

**3. What kind of percentage changes in the County's Health and Human Services budget would you recommend to improve to an adequate level of service on an ongoing basis? Where will this funding be?**

The issue is not the amount of money but the systems we have in place to ensure that we are using the money we have in the best way possible.

**4. There has been criticism of COVID safety in MultCo jails. What would you do as County Chair to improve safety (COVID and otherwise) in the county's corrections facilities?**

I would use the same approach to improve safety with our adults in custody as any other population. As an ER Doctor my views on COVID 19 have always been based on the most current state of medical research, best practices, my direct experience on the front line of medicine in the emergency department, hearing feedback from fellow healthcare providers, and doing what we know saves lives. What's been missing from our current approach has been rational and consistent guidance, direct and effective communication, and an acknowledgement and balancing of other needs.

**5. What new ideas do you have for improving collaboration between the County and other local governments, particularly the cities and school districts?**

The biggest barriers to progress relate to structure, leadership, centralization/coordination, data, government processes and accountability. We need a true collaborative partnership with (blended) funding, shared leadership and aligned vision and involvement across agencies. Teams with the right people to break down barriers in real time and get innovative approaches moving in real time.