

Housing Affordability Strategy

Joshua Skov for Eugene City Council • March 2016 • This document is available at www.joshuaskov.com/housing.

We have a crisis of housing affordability in our community, as in many cities around the country. As a city councilor, I will push to address this challenge and its related policy challenges with this Housing Affordability Strategy, an integrated approach that addresses tenant rights, land use, downtown development, homelessness and more.

The problem

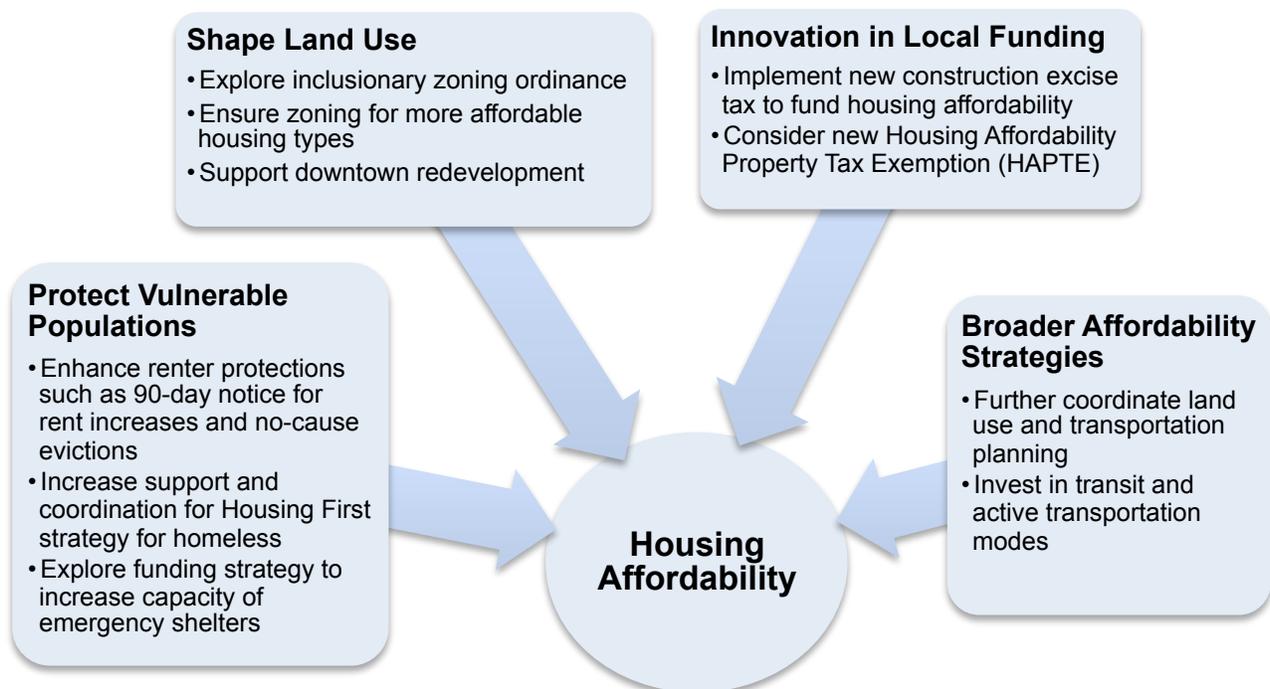
More than 30% of Oregon households are *housing cost-burdened*, which means that these households are spending more than a third of their income on housing. A significant number of those households spend 50% of their income on housing, making them especially vulnerable to employment or health-related disruptions. Wait lists for subsidized affordable housing have exploded. So while we have roughly 2,000-3,000 homeless people in the Eugene-Springfield area, we also have roughly 20,000 *households* that are housing cost-burdened in Eugene alone.

Our housing challenges have complex connections to other community goals, such as addressing homelessness, protecting farm and forest land at the urban periphery, transforming our transportation system, and taking meaningful action on climate change. We will make headway on all of these fronts only if we have an integrated approach.

An essential part of an integrated approach is addressing affordability for different income segments. An integrated strategy must address the needs of the most vulnerable people who are threatened by or are experiencing homelessness, support working students and single-income households, and provide genuine options for low-income working families. This strategy attempts to improve all of those circumstances.

The solution: an integrated approach with clear connections

The focus here is not on the details of each policy, but to explain the importance of connecting these challenges and taking them on at the same time. This strategy addresses the following key components, as shown in the diagram.



Protect Vulnerable Populations

We must enforce the recent law providing tenant protections that ensure continued housing access for vulnerable renters, such as 90-day notice for rent increases and no-cause evictions. For our unhoused population in need of access to services and treatment, the City must also strengthen its support of the Housing First approach by offering resources and coordination with existing efforts. Housing First is a more cost-effective approach to providing a path to self-sufficiency for individuals with chronic housing needs.

It is also time to explore funding options for and the viability of key enhancements to our safety net for acutely homeless: either a full-service public shelter or a more robust and coordinated network of simple emergency shelters, similar to (and including) the existing warming centers, to provide a bridge to social services and Housing First opportunities.

Shape Land Use

A major element of affordability is land use. First, we must plan and zone for housing *diversity*, fostering different types of multi-family housing that is inherently more affordable. Specifically in Eugene, we must ensure zoning for “missing middle” housing types – options such as duplexes, multiplexes, townhomes, and courtyard apartments that are in the middle between single-family houses and mid-rise apartment buildings. The “missing middle” can offer livability and neighborhood compatibility while increasing density.

With a recent law from our legislature, the city can also consider inclusionary zoning, which would require that all new multi-family buildings above a certain size include some portion of lower-rent housing for qualifying families or individuals. We have the opportunity to consider best practices from elsewhere and tailor a solution to our circumstances.

Finally, we must support downtown redevelopment, including housing. Housing in the urban core is closer to most services, has lower infrastructure costs for the city, protects farmland and forest land from sprawl. Furthermore, putting multi-family housing in and near downtown will be our best strategy for increasing the housing supply while preserving the character of existing neighborhoods of single-family homes.

Innovation in Local Funding

We need new funds to help shape development of these new housing options. A new state law now allows an excise tax of 1% for new construction. In addition to using our modest room for funding affordable housing with flexibility around current fees, such as System Development Charges, we must implement this tax – with an exemption for affordable housing – and immediately explore how to target improvements to the housing stock for those most in need.

I pledge to lead a conversation at council and in the community about how best to support affordable housing alternatives. I will also propose consideration of a new Housing Affordability Property Tax Exemption (HAPTE) – a revamped version of our Multi-Unit Property Tax Exemption (MUPT) focused entirely on affordable housing options. We have the technical capacity to implement a HAPTE quickly because of the extensive research that led to the conditions for our revised MUPT (fair labor practices, green building, etc.), but it may require a change in state law.

Broader Affordability Strategies

We need council leadership and support for continued coordination of land use and transportation planning to improve combined “Housing+Transportation” affordability. Investments in transit, walking, and bicycling infrastructure can complement investments in housing and provide transportation options, reducing residents’ expensive reliance on the automobile and resulting in increased affordability as well as public benefit from reduced traffic.

Housing affordability: a centerpiece piece of my platform, and my experience

I have worked for years as a volunteer on land use, transportation, and sustainability issues that are at the center of these challenges, and as a current member of the City of Eugene Budget Committee. I understand the nuances of land use, and how challenging it is to foster change that meets everyone’s vision of livability, neighborhoods, and other objectives. My commitment and experience will be essential for working with staff, the community, and the rest of Council to craft effective policies to address these issues.