

## Ben Stuckart---Mayoral Candidate

### Hospitality

1. Investments to encourage restaurants and hotels continue to thrive?

I helped pass the Riverfront Park renovations and led the effort to pass the public safety levy. I want to ensure that more police officers are downtown as promised the voters and make downtown as liveable as possible. I tripled funding for the arts which has made downtown more vibrant. I want to ensure the North Bank Sportsplexx, a partnership between the PFD and the City of Spokane opens and time and is successful. We also need to fill in the 76 vacant lots downtown if we want to continue our recent record setting growth!

2. Short-term goals and long-term goals?

We need to open the shelters during the day and provide services in those shelters that connect people needing a bed to resources to help them get on their feet. In the long run we need to address the housing crisis. We should have 5,000 more people living in downtown Spokane and we should have density around all of our centers and corridors. We will work to upzone areas around our centers and corridors to create foot traffic and strengthen our neighborhood business centers.

3. Business Regulatory Environment?

All permitting should be able to be done online. We will implement an evidence based department of employee led innovation (which is how we originally decreased permitting times in 2012). I am in favor of decreasing parking regulations in our business centers to lessen the cost of building new businesses and allowing buildings to be taller to allow for more businesses.

4. Public safety?

We have led the effort to put 52 new officers on the streets in the last 5 years and I sponsored the public safety levy. This will add an additional 20 more officers. These officers are already improving public safety and that will continue. Crime has decreased in 2019 by 14% already.

5. Growth?

The Growth Management Act restricts us from growing out. Thus we must have more housing variety and density in our city. This can be done by upzoning areas around our centers and corridors.

6. Commercial Affordability?

The more people we have downtown the more businesses will thrive. The more people live near our centers and corridors the more those businesses will thrive. If we target our investments similar to the project I led on East Sprague we will have stronger neighborhoods. I can't control the rent people charge but we can continue to limit utility rate increases to match CPI and try to increase the supply.

7. City and Hall and Business Community relationship?

I meet monthly with Greater Spokane Incorporated, Downtown Spokane Partnership and any other groups that would like to meet. I do not think the relationship is strained. That is why I believe I have the support of Scott Morris, CEO of Avista, Doug Yost from Centennial Properties, Larry Stone from Scafco, Larry Soehren from Kiemle Hagood and other people that build things in our community. They trust I have done a good job building relationships and will continue to do that.

8. Homelessness? And 9. What is right and better?

### **MY BACKGROUND**

My father Larry Stuckart spent his entire 38-year career working at Spokane Neighborhood Action Programs (SNAP), the region's largest Community Action agency. Their mission is to increase the human potential of our community by providing opportunities for people in need. In 2017, SNAP moved over 400 community members from homelessness to housing. My father, and my Catholic upbringing instilled many values, with the most important being to care for each other and help provide basic human dignity.

I have spent 13 years as a manager in private business, four years doing non-profit prevention work in the community and seven years in city government. Learning from my father, working with nonprofits, managing in the business world and crafting policy in government have given me one very clear perspective: **There is never going to be a single solution to solve homelessness.**

I remember an NPR story about 9 years ago where New York City wanted to eliminate homelessness in Times Square. The city assigned a social worker to create relationships with those on the streets and connect them with available services. It took years to accomplish this task, but they kept working at it. In one instance, it took a social worker two years just to get one of the individuals to speak with her. Everyone has different needs, but we can meet them if we put the resources and effort into it.

### **HOMELESSNESS**

Homelessness has dominated the headlines for the past year and has always been a divisive subject. Some will try and explain that if we offer any services, we are only going to attract people needing those services to our community. Alternately, others feel we can never do enough to help those in need. **On all sides, opinions are strong, and misinformation is vast.** However, we are making progress.

- *The number of chronically homeless individuals is down*
- *We have doubled the number of young people in transitional housing*
- *The number of families facing homelessness is down*
- *We continue to see a decline in veteran homelessness*

There are still plenty of challenges that remain, particularly reducing homelessness among single adults. This is a complicated topic that requires multiple approaches based on data, best practices and the compassionate values of our city. We must recognize that addiction, untreated mental health conditions, post-traumatic stress, family violence and unforeseen emergencies are struggles that can't be overcome unless families, neighbors and communities care about each other.

We focus so much on emergent actions instead of long-term solutions when it comes to homelessness. There is work happening right now at the City and in our community that I strongly support. There are new ideas and policies I will bring forward as your Mayor. There are also proposals out there that I do not support because they are not based on data, best practices or compassionate values. **Most importantly, I want your feedback and ideas on solving this issue.**

## **ESTABLISHING A SERVICE STANDARD**

**The City of Spokane needs to immediately streamline and reimagine its shelter program.** We can no longer piecemeal an emergency shelter or warming center system. We need a no-barrier shelter system that keeps our citizens safe, the surrounding community secure and connects citizens to the critical services they need to survive and get into stable housing. The Spokane Resource Center located at Second Avenue and Arthur is the model for one-stop assistance. That model should be emulated in our shelter system.

**The City of Spokane needs to actively end camping in our public parks and in river access areas.** Camping in our parks and in river access areas is illegal. Most importantly, it is not safe for campers, presents significant public health issues and is simply not a dignified solution to homelessness. There should be no need for camping in public parks with an adequate reimaged shelter system. Importantly, we must have adequate low-barrier shelter space to enforce our 'no camping on public lands' laws under the recent *Martin v. City of Boise* 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling. We should never support camping in our public areas when there are safe spaces with services available to all.

**I support City Hall remaining a place where citizens conduct their public business.** City Hall is a place where you can pay your water bill, check out art, pull a permit, sign up for coed volleyball, apply for employment, request public information, meet with your elected officials,

and seek human services. City Hall reflects the services that the City offers. This is how City Hall has operated since 1984 and I believe it works just fine.

## **COMMUNITY SECURITY**

**We must not confuse homelessness with criminal behavior. They are not the same.** There is no correlation between crime and homelessness. It is not a crime to be without a home. It is, however, a crime to rob, assault, openly consume alcohol or smoke marijuana, or commit burglary. These are laws enforced right now. It is misleading for political activists to disparage the police officers who work every day to reduce and eliminate crime in our city. We must make sure officers have the tools necessary to eliminate crime downtown, and across the city. Importantly, we must empower officers to guide those who are vulnerable to improve the safety of those citizens, and the entire community.

**We must increase the number of police officers and mental health workers in the Community Diversion Unit.** I have made it a priority to hire additional police in every budget I have presided over as City Council President because public safety continues to be the community's top priority. We have added over 50 officers to the Police Force since 2014, and these officers are having an impact. We are seeing a reduction in crime including assaults, vehicle thefts, and sex crimes. I sponsored the 2019 Public Safety Levy to continue reducing crime in our city and to help tackle some of the mental health issues we see downtown. It is why I am a strong supporter of the Community Diversion Unit that pairs an officer with a mental health worker to help our citizens in mental health crisis. This program is working and should be expanded.

**We must make Alternative Courts like Community Court permanent.** The City of Spokane has an excellent Municipal Court system, but it can be even better. I have been a strong supporter of the Community Court. It has shown great success but needs permanent financial and policy commitment from City administration. Importantly, our Municipal Court system should all be located together in a safe building where clients, Prosecutors, Public Defenders, and Judges can conduct court efficiently. We can accomplish this through a consolidation of the municipal court system with minimal investment that will save operating costs in the long run.

## **PERMANENT SOLUTIONS**

**Without permanent housing, citizens in transitional housing have no place to go. Without availability in transitional housing, our residents stay on the streets.** In 2018, 800 people in Spokane had housing vouchers yet could not find housing. A housing voucher is as good as cash in terms of housing. *But 800 people sought help, did everything right, and still ended-up on our streets.* Although on average about 50 units per year are built in Spokane for our chronically homeless population, there is very little affordable housing being built for working families or for our aging population. Furthermore, the city's dangerously low vacancy rates have led to large increases in rent. This is a dangerous combination. This is the definition of an affordable housing crisis. The City's recent Point-in-Time Count suggests that the lack of affordable housing is behind only family conflict and lack of income as the primary reason for unsheltered homelessness in our community.

**We must work on affordable housing in two ways: by creating additional housing opportunities and by supporting affordable housing programs.** We must fully implement the city's Comprehensive Plan and fulfill the intent of the Growth Management Act. We are an urban center and as such, should have the zoning, design standards, and infrastructure capable sustaining dense development. Our Comprehensive Plan suggests we utilize our business centers and corridors to locate our density. This is where we should concentrate growth. A great example is Monroe Street . The City recently invested in a safe and accessible North Monroe street that has proven to be a game changer for the neighborhood. We see businesses popping-up and new visitors to the shops. But the neighborhood lacks the density to sustain many of these businesses over the long-term. Increasing density in this corridor will be better for business, better for public health and better for our environment.

**We need a local housing trust fund to help meet the demand for affordable housing in our community.** The federal government has failed cities across America. In 1992, the City of Spokane received \$1.4 million in federal HOME dollars. Last year, the City received just \$1.2 million and will likely to see further cuts. Not only has affordable housing support from the federal government been reduced, inflation has decimated the buying power of the remaining dollars being provided. We cannot continue wasting time reviewing committee findings, or study after study. We need to be injecting nearly \$5 million per year into affordable housing in the city of Spokane to meet demand. If we do not, it will not matter how motivated people are to escape homelessness and poverty, they will not be able to get off our streets and into housing.

**We must create local jobs by building up local businesses.** The lack of income or a job is one the biggest causes for unsheltered homelessness in our city. Spokane is a community that suffers from a high level of generational poverty. The City has prioritized raising the median household income of its citizens. We can do that by supporting the skill development of new workers through apprenticeship programs such as the Head Start to the Construction Trades. We should support our business organizations such as the Spokane Independent Metro Alliance that help local businesses to grow the right way. We need to ensure that Spokane is a city that offers opportunities for people to work. We may never recover the manufacturing jobs we lost in the 1970's and 1980's, but we can continue building a 21st century economy by building up our local business districts, eliminating barriers to business growth, investing in our public development authorities and investing in the workers that make our city able to compete against any place.

**We don't need soundbites. We need action.**

**We need commitment.**

I welcome your thoughts and ideas. Following are a few of my proposals:

- Streamline the emergency shelter system by increasing service access in the shelter
- Increase the number of officers and mental health workers in the Community Diversion Unit

- Make the City's Community Court permanent and explore consolidation of municipal court system
- Enforce the laws currently on the books
- Actively end camping on public lands and river access areas
- Invest in innovative programs such as Hope Works and mediation services for homeless citizens facing family conflict
- Create a local housing trust fund
- Increase density in our centers and corridors
- Support job training and apprenticeship programs
- Support in small business incubators and organizations
- Invest resources in local business districts and public development authorities