

Northwest Washington Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Whatcom Candidate Questionnaire 2023

Full Legal Name: Elizabeth Anne Darrow

Candidate for: City Council Ward 3, City of Bellingham

Anticipated opponent(s): Dan Hammill

Party Affiliation, if any: Democrat

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Printer: Capitol City Press

Occupation: Legislative Advocate

Years of residency in Washington State: 24 (I was born here but have lived in a couple different places. Most recently I've lived here for 24 years).

County of Residence: Whatcom

Number of years in County: 24

Community or Organizations and Memberships (past or present): Community to Community Development, Lettered Streets Neighborhood Association, Raid Relief to Reunite Families, Whatcom Democrats, 42nd LD Democrats

Union affiliation if any, past or present: Bellingham Tenants Union (supporter), Familias Unidas por la Justicia (affiliated through C2C, not as a member/worker)

Education:

BA from Fairhaven College, 2003

Please provide comprehensive answers for all questions.

1. What labor and community endorsements have you received?

I am endorsed by Community to Community Development and Serenity Outreach Services. I am hoping to get endorsements from BTU, FUJ, UFCW3000, Teamsters231, SEIU1199, Laborers292, IBEW191, SBWU, but this is the first questionnaire that I have received.

2. Please list your qualifications and reasons for seeking this office.

Currently I serve on the Immigration Advisory Board with the City of Bellingham, I am the co-chair of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood Association, I am the Precinct Committee Officer of precinct 238 in Bellingham, and I am an active member of the Whatcom Democrats and the 42nd LD Democrats. I have worked as a legislative advocate with Community to Community Development for the past five years. In this role I help to analyze local, state and federal policy, and stand alongside workers as they mobilize to push for the policy changes that improve the lives of farm workers and immigrants in our state. In the past 5 years, I have worked closely with farmworkers and immigrants to win SB 5438, which established the Agricultural & Seasonal Workforce Services Advisory Committee, helped to write an ordinance which passed 7-0 in the city of Bellingham to establish an Immigration Advisory Board, worked toward landmark legislation to grant agricultural workers overtime (Washington is the first state to do this), Supported the creation of Raid Relief to Reunite Families during the Granite Precast ICE raid in 2018, worked actively as a member of the Immigration Advisory Board since it was created in 2019 to analyze and recommend policy proposals to the city of Bellingham, and continued to stand in solidarity with workers on picket lines and during marches in the area whenever possible.

I am seeking this office because I love this community. In my roles on the neighborhood association, in the IAB, and as a legislative advocate, I am lucky to work with hundreds of community members whose priorities are not currently represented in local policy making spaces. We saw this clearly last year when city council voted 4-3 against funding an Immigrant Resource Center. We saw this during the Bellingham Cold Storage Strike, when council did not come out with strong public support for the workers in that struggle, and when city council passed a unanimous resolution against the People First Initiatives, two of which would have improved worker rights and protections. I see this everyday in my neighborhood and hear from people who want stronger representation. I am excited and ready to listen and work toward solutions that represent all of the people living in Bellingham.

3. Please describe any union-related mediations, negotiations, arbitrations, or labor disputes you have been involved in.

I was honored to witness the voting process for the packing shed workers in Yakima in 2020. Ultimately that group of workers decided not to unionize, but being invited in for the vote was a humbling

experience. I also stood in solidarity with the tulip workers in Skagit Valley last year during their picket line, and while their vote was private, I witnessed and celebrated with the community when they announced that more than 80 workers voted to take next steps toward unionization. Similarly, I stood on the picket line with Crystal View Farm workers in 2018 during the heat and wildfire season, with workers at Bellingham Cold Storage in 2021, and more recently with workers from Mt Baker Roofing Company (those workers are still awaiting necessary support from L&I, but many have moved on to form their own worker cooperative).

4. Frequently when workers try to form a union in their workplaces, employers use a variety of tactics to turn the workers against the union. These tactics may include forced meetings with the employer, cutting the employees' hours, intimidation and firing pro-union workers. If an employer in our community engaged in such tactics, how would you respond?

I recently learned that Mt Baker Roofing Company has hired a consultant to attempt to dismantle the efforts of the workers there to unionize. I am one hundred percent against union busting. Starbucks has done the same thing. Retaliation against workers of any kind is unacceptable. If I were elected to city council, I would use that platform to publicly stand with workers and demand that employers who engage in union busting tactics cease immediately. As a legislative advocate, I am often tasked with crafting and publishing letter writing campaigns and direct actions against employers who are using anti labor tactics. I feel that council members have an added responsibility to participate because of their elevated position, and yet it is very rare that we see council people come out strong for labor (with exceptions, of course).

5. Currently 27 states have laws which have been called "right to work." Above all, the laws mandate that nonunionized workers cannot be required to pay the equivalent of union dues, even if the union is negotiating pay and benefits on the workers' behalf. There have been attempts to pass such legislation in Whatcom County. What is your view on such laws? How would you react if such legislation were introduced in Bellingham, Whatcom County or any of the small cities in Whatcom County?

"Right to work" is a misnomer. It is already illegal to force workers to join a union. Right to work laws intentionally divide labor power so that bosses have the upper hand. Whether or not I am elected, I will always fight against unjust labor laws. Every worker should have the right to healthcare, fair pay, and time off to enjoy life beyond the workplace. Every worker should have the opportunity to organize for a better quality of life.

6. Under what conditions, if any, would you support contracting-out public services?

I don't believe in shortcuts to save money. For this reason, I am not a proponent of contracting out services. I think it's a tactic to keep wages low and avoid existing labor laws and the opportunity for workers to organize. I want to hear more from union leadership about this, but my initial feeling is that public service jobs should be union jobs with opportunities for apprenticeships and representation which not only strengthens worker protections but builds the economy and the quality of life for families who live and work here.

7. Last year rail workers went on strike over the lack of paid sick leave. Congress passed and President Biden signed into law a bill making a rail strike illegal. What is your position on public workers striking and how would you respond if City (County) employees went on strike?

Public workers should absolutely be allowed to strike. Striking is not a decision taken lightly by workers, and is often a last resort when every other communication attempt with management has failed. I think it is completely inappropriate for the Executive branch of our government to wield their power against workers. On the local level, when workers strike, I believe our elected officials should be on the line with them showing support. I know that public sector employees are not legally allowed to strike currently, and I know that sometimes they do anyway, because they have no other choice in order to get their needs met. I have stood in solidarity on a number of strike lines, and I know that workers and families suffer greatly in order to get their needs heard through a strike. I think every employee should have the right to publicly advocate for their needs to be met. If city/county workers go on strike, I will stand with them in solidarity, just like I would with any other workers.

8. Community workforce agreements/Project Labor Agreements are a construction project tool for both public and private construction owners to facilitate community involvement and ensure labor harmony as administered by local, state or other building trades related organizations. Over time these agreements have proven effective to save time, money and headache by the upfront agreement to project expectations. CWA projects guarantee that the owner and the represented crafts will work together with the community to provide opportunity for pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship and veteran employment to construct a quality project on time and on budget. If elected, what will you do to promote these agreements for public construction?

Currently the city has a requirement that any construction project over one million dollars includes an apprenticeship program. Recently I learned about non-union apprenticeships, for example through the Working Waterfront Coalition. I don't think that private apprenticeship programs are as effective or meaningful as union apprenticeship programs. If I am elected, I will work harder to make sure that there aren't loopholes in the apprenticeship program requirements, and that the requirements are realistic reflections of projects proposed. One example of that is requiring union contractors for development. The city of Seattle has recently done that, so we know that it is possible.

9. Whatcom County Public Works employees (members of Teamsters 231) have been working without an agreement for at least four months and often don't make enough in wages to keep up with the high cost of living. How would you address conflicts of this type and how will you work to ensure that unionized public employees can afford to live where they work

Whatcom County is the largest Teamsters 231 contract with 450 employees represented. All of those employees have been without a contract, including public works employees. I appreciate that the county has entered into an MOU to cover healthcare, but I don't think that's enough. I don't think our local elected officials push hard enough for fair contracts for workers, especially the workers who are making sure that the city and county continue to run. What the workers are asking for is not unreasonable, but I do not currently see a lot of elected leadership at the city or the county level who are willing to fight on the side of the workers. It is also possible that the communication between the county's legal team, the workers, and county council has not been completely transparent or easy to follow. I would advocate for

more transparency to ensure that elected officials and workers are getting accurate information from the legal team.

10. The labor movement has successfully raised labor standards to retain jobs with high wages and good benefits. In the grocery industry when employers have consolidated, there is downward pressure from non-union employers to cut benefits or lower wages. Some local jurisdictions have passed laws requiring that when consolidation occurs in an industry, workers are protected through statute to retain their jobs with existing wages and benefits. Would you support such policies to protect workers when companies are consolidated?

I am deeply concerned about grocery mergers, especially with the current proposal for a Kroger/Albertson's merger. We saw devastating effects of the restructuring of Albertsons/Safeway/Haggen locally in recent years. I don't believe that city council has done enough to stand up to these corporate mergers/restructuring. Grocery store mergers historically demonstrate that companies gain huge profits even as they are closing large numbers of stores, leaving workers without a viable option for employment. I absolutely support employees keeping their wages and benefits after a merger, but I fundamentally oppose grocery mergers in the first place.

11. What activities have you done in the past to support workers? Check all that apply.

- ☒ Walked a picket line.
- ☐ Mediated with employers.
- ☒ Wrote letters of support for workers.
- ☒ Fought for proper enforcement of labor laws.
- ☒ Spoken at a rally for workers.

12. What activities would you take to support workers if elected? Check all that apply.

- ☒ Walk a picket line
- ☒ Attend a rally to support workers
- ☒ Write a letter to support workers
- ☒ Fight for of enforcement of current labor laws
- ☒ Speak out publicly in support of workers.

13. Why are you seeking the endorsement of NW WA Central Labor Council?

I have seen members of UFCW3000, Teamsters321, Starbucks Workers United, IWW, BTU, FUJ, and more all united on the strikeline for Mt Baker Roofing Company workers, or tulip workers, or dairy workers, or cold storage workers, and most of the people there haven't ever met the workers before. Everyone shows up because the values are fundamental to what it means to have a full and vibrant life. That solidarity is what inspires me. So much of the work that I do as a legislative advocate is informed by union organizing. We are lucky in Whatcom County and in Washington state to have such robust union participation; everyone working to avoid an injury to one. It is truly what keeps me going to work everyday, and if I am elected, I will represent workers in all of the policy making decisions that come before me. Thank you for considering me for endorsement. Happy International Workers Day!

