



# 2018 Legislative candidate survey

Candidate name: James Thomas Legislative district: 35<sup>th</sup>

You are a candidate for: House of Representatives  Senate

If you are a candidate for the House of Representatives, which position are your running for? Position 1  Position 2

## Local government background

Have you ever been elected or appointed to a local government position, or served on a local government board, committee, or as staff? *Local governments include cities, counties, public utility districts, school districts, fire protection districts, port districts, and more.* Yes  No

If yes, in what capacity?

I currently chair the Economic Development Council of Mason County  
I currently chair the Planning Advisory Commission of Mason County

## 1. State-shared local revenues

When the state encounters fiscal problems, legislators often take revenues historically shared with cities, or increase fees on services provided to cities to fill the state's budget deficit. Recently, some shared revenues have been restored. However, during the last recession, the Legislature enacted cuts and diversions, while unfunded mandates and other local government cost drivers remained unaddressed, including the following items:

- Changes in liquor tax and profit distributions resulting in losses of nearly \$200 million in funds that supported essential local services, such as public safety;
- Sweeping and diverting over \$1 billion in local utility taxes, real estate taxes, and project loan repayments from the nationally-acclaimed Public Works Trust Fund (PWTF) that helps keep local infrastructure operating; and
- Requiring cities to pay training fees for officers attending the Basic Law Enforcement Academy (BLEA).

Do you support or oppose the Legislature continuing to use locally-shared revenues or revenues intended for capital projects in order to balance the state's operating budget? Support  Oppose

Briefly describe one or more actions that you would take to ensure your views on these issues are accounted for by your caucus and in a final budget.

Problems are best solved and opportunities best pursued by the governmental entities closest to them. Cities and counties face mounting demands and shrinking opportunities to increase revenues. I will lobby aggressively to sequester funds necessary for cities and counties.

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## 2. Basic infrastructure financing

Cities face many challenges when repairing and updating critical infrastructure such as drinking water and sewer systems. Historically, the Public Works Trust Fund (PWTF), a revolving loan fund, was a significant source for financing infrastructure. As the state wrestled first with a recession and then with the *McCleary* education funding challenges, legislators repeatedly turned to diverting these funds and leaving nothing in their place. Since 2013, nearly all of the tax revenues deposited into the PWTF were diverted to the state's education funding account instead. Those revenues were scheduled to come back to the PWTF in 2019, but the revenue diversions were extended another four years.

**Would you support or oppose a budget that diverted more resources from the PWTF to address state general fund obligations?**

	Support	Oppose
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**Do you believe that it is part of the state's obligation to help fund critical local infrastructure, especially when taxes and fees raised to do so in 1985 continue to be levied?**

Yes	No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**As a lawmaker, how will you work to secure the revitalization of the PWTF and protect it from future raids?**

By supporting legislation to sequester PWTF funds for their intended use and by ensuring that PWTF continues to be funded.

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## 3. Homelessness, affordable housing, and mental health

Across the state, housing costs are rising and affordability issues are impacting homebuyers and renters, as well as exacerbating the already critical homelessness problems in many communities. Mental health services are stretched thin and cities (not normally in the business of providing these particular social services) find themselves increasingly trying to help residents and keep their communities safe and secure. Cities have a strong desire to work together with the state, counties, business, nonprofit, and faith communities to help address these challenges. We continue to seek financing, regulatory, and funding tools to help.

**Which of the following are priorities for you? Choose all that apply.**

- Help to end homelessness
- Ensure adequate mental health services for those in need
- Provide tools to help control the spiraling cost of housing

**Would you support or oppose a proposal for the state to override local zoning or density decisions to promote more affordability in housing construction?**

Support	Oppose
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**Please elaborate on what you suggest doing to address one or more of these issues:**

I am not in favor of the state overriding local zoning and density decisions and doubt any such efforts would pass legal muster because of GMA and various entities' Comprehensive Plans.

The best way for the legislature to help end homelessness, ensure adequate mental health services, and control the spiraling cost of housing is to adequately fund cities and counties and to legislate to allow both more latitude in raising local funds.

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## 4. Economic development

Economic development opportunities vary greatly across the state. Some communities have deteriorating commercial or industrial areas or lack the needed infrastructure for critical development, and others lack access to adequate broadband services. AWC supports expansion of current programs and funding, including expansion of state Local Revitalization Financing (LRF) and Local Infrastructure Financing Tool (LIFT) programs as options to incentivize economic development and support job creation.

**Would you support or oppose legislation that expands the financing options available to local governments for economic development?**      Support      Oppose  
     

### **What other ideas do you have for bolstering the state's economic development opportunities?**

I would like to make it much easier for cities and counties to enter into public-private partnerships and GSEs to spur development in areas where the private sector alone isn't stepping up.

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## 5. Local control

Cities succeed when they can respond to local residents' unique needs and desired outcomes through exercising local control. The State Constitution and state statutes provide cities with wide discretion in serving their communities. However, the Legislature sometimes considers preempting cities from enacting local ordinances or engaging in certain activities. We believe that the relationship between the state and cities functions best as a partnership, where the state gives careful consideration to the varied conditions of local governments, and appreciates the importance of retaining local flexibility.

**Do you believe that local control is important to ensuring responsive local government?**      Yes      No  
     

**If you disagree that local control should be preserved**, please describe one or more specific issue areas or situations in which the state should preempt local control.

**OR**

**If you agree that local control should be respected**, please describe how you would argue for the protection of local control to colleagues who want to preempt local governments.

It is a core belief of mine that problems and opportunities are both best addressed by the governmental structures closest to those problems and opportunities. State legislatures will never have the granularity of vision to recognize and address all of the particulars of cities and counties in our sprawling state. The legislature should work to set broad goals for the state and where appropriate to provide adequate funding for communities to address local needs.

If you have any questions, please contact Regina Adams, AWC Government Relations Coordinator, at 360-753-4137 or [ReginaA@awcnet.org](mailto:ReginaA@awcnet.org). Please return your survey **by the end of the day on Wednesday, July 4** by:

- Email to [ReginaA@awcnet.org](mailto:ReginaA@awcnet.org);
- Fax to (360) 753-0149; or
- U.S. mail to AWC Candidate Survey, 1076 Franklin Street SE, Olympia, WA 98501-1346.

**Thank you for your participation!**