1. DC has a deep-seated problem with income and wealth inequality that falls along racial lines. Median income in Ward 8 is $39K versus $110K in Ward 1. Worst of all, there has been no significant progress in reducing inequality, and the growing wealth of the city is concentrated increasingly at the top. Do you think the Council’s work has been sufficient? If not, what should the Council do differently?

Although more recent measures have moved us into a positive direction to address this deep-seated problem, I don’t believe the Council’s work has been sufficient especially since this gap continues to widen year over year.

The Council should set a clear goal to increase progress in reducing this inequality in the Wards where median income is lower compared to other Wards. Many top priorities for residents such as education, healthcare, housing, safety, and infrastructure all are interconnected with income and wealth. When there is new legislation that touches on these areas, there should be a callout on how this piece could positively impact closing the wealth gap to fulfill the overall goal.

Also, I believe the Council needs even more diverse representation. If elected, I would be the first Asian American and daughter of refugees to serve on Council and first woman of color to serve Ward 1. This doesn’t immediately solve income and wealth inequality, but it adds a much needed and different perspective that can help push for initiatives that better address the issues for all residents in Washington, DC.

2. There is a growing national movement for guaranteed income, and in DC the Mothers Outreach Network is leading the local campaign. What are your views on guaranteed income?

Financial instability and poverty have been linked to adverse effects on mental and physical health which can then wreck havoc on all other areas of life. I am in favor of guaranteed income because I believe it’s a direct way to lift people out of financial instability and
poverty by providing economic security, equitable outcomes, and a long-term, overall positive well-being. The pandemic has only exacerbated the wealth gap and it’s imperative that Council passes and funds legislation that gets a guaranteed income to families and people in need to close these disparities.

3. Our affordable housing programs target families earning up to 80% of median family income, or $103K for a family of four. This statistic is based on the wealthy suburbs of MD and DC, as well as wealthy areas within DC. By way of comparison, the median income in Ward 8 is $39K. Should we take a different approach to defining affordable housing?

Affordability is misleading, especially when we look at it from the 60-80% MFI range. In Ward 1, oftentimes, we see people who have more privilege, that come from more affluent backgrounds, and may be just starting out in DC qualify for “affordable” housing. This isn’t to say that they shouldn’t qualify for this, but it distorts what affordable housing is actually needed and for who it’s actually affordable for. I believe we absolutely need to take a different approach in defining affordable housing and showcase the difference between affordable and deeply affordable. If I am elected, I would like to propose legislation on developing a transparent dashboard for the public to see data on how much housing stock we have at each range of MFI (beyond the outdated dashboard on DMPED’s website), make adjustments for inclusionary zoning units on new developments to include 30% MFI, and develop better community education (compiled list of resources, tools, grants, information on vouchers, etc.) to help residents best advocate for their housing needs and to secure it.

4. DC for Democracy members are increasingly skeptical that the real estate industry can be relied on to build the appropriate number of affordable housing units needed for low-income families. That’s why some are very interested in alternative housing models, such as community land trusts, limited equity co-ops and social housing. What role, if any, do these models play in your housing platform, and what scale of public investment should be made in them?

All of these alternative housing models have a place in my platform as they represent critical initiatives to achieve more, long-term, affordable housing units. Community land...
trusts, limited equity co-ops and social housing give people the ability to build wealth, increase community engagement, and provide resistance to displacement. It makes more sense for more public investment in these models because they retain their affordability over the longer-term versus working with the real estate industry where affordable housing only needs to be kept at those prices for 15 years.

I’d like to mention two other investments that are in my housing platform and aren’t mentioned above. First, one of the immediate things that Council can leverage is the increased role the DC government and community can take with district-owned properties. For these parcels that are up for redevelopment, I would like to introduce legislation that requires deeply affordable housing (30-40% MFI and if housing is a viable option) and required community benefits negotiated, similar to Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). More recently, the Reeves Center redevelopment process showed me that even though this has been a pillar in revitalizing U St and is currently a municipal building, as a community we were at the whim of the developers’ plans. Both development teams are seeking “matter of right” plans, which means they are building within the bounds of zoning regulations effectively cutting off any community engagement. If they were pursuing some type of variance, relief, and/or seeking the redevelopment as a PUD, then they would have to appear in front of the ANC to solicit community feedback. However, as the policy currently stands, developers have more of a say in the outcomes of the district-owned land than the residents who are impacted by these properties.

Second, we cannot have a conversation about affordable housing without talking about public housing. Ward 1 has several public housing buildings and some of these buildings are long-overdue for renovation and are plagued with issues that make these places almost unlivable. Public housing buildings need to be renovated, developed to meet climate change, and become dignified places for people to live.

5. **There is a highly charged debate about community safety. Some say the answer is to invest in more police. Others say we should address the root causes of violence by investing in housing, education and basic needs, as well as alternative approaches, such as violence interruption services. What policies or budget changes will you prioritize for the safety of Ward 1 residents?**
Sabel Harris  
Ward 1 Council Candidate Questionnaire

Zero-sum solutions do not work and we need a comprehensive approach when it comes to community safety that helps reduce violence over the short-term and long-term without further harming black and brown communities. Violence is multi-pronged and complex, but with bold leadership and insightful planning we can address these prongs simultaneously. Providing people with a livable wage, comprehensive healthcare that includes mental health support, and affordable housing inside the neighborhoods they know, will help grow more fulfilling, thriving, and safe communities.

I believe we need heavy investment and performance tracking on jobs and youth programs. Currently, there aren’t many OST (out-of-school time) or other programs for 16-24 year olds that provide safe and healthy pathways away from violence. These programs may have also been paused due to the pandemic, but if elected as Councilmember I want to increase funding and services for virtual programs (funding for wifi and devices) to restart these programs.

We do not do nearly enough in tracking the performance and efficacy of these programs to identify what is working and what isn’t. A lot of times we throw money at these programs and expect them to just work. I’ve talked with some folks who have been through these trainings and they’ve all shown me the certificates of completion; however, they haven’t gotten the jobs to then utilize the skills they’ve learned. We need to ensure there is job placement by working with District agencies and private organizations.

Violence takes lives, but it also devastates and traumatizes families, children, friends, and the community overall. We are not doing nearly enough to reach people who are victims of violence and/or people who are most at-risk to commit acts of violence. We do need to meet these people with cognitive-behavioral therapy. There are several organizations, including one in Columbia Heights, that works on the ground level for this and I believe the Council can help expand grants and funding for these entities.

I do believe Violence Interrupters (through ONSE or Cure the Streets) do incredibly important work. However, they only work on a block by block basis and in certain areas where a “threshold” of violence has been met. This measurement is backwards as any shooting or instance of violence is one too many. Just this year alone, U St NW has seen 5-7 shootings (not including the stabbings, car jackings, and more), and currently no violence
interrupters have been deployed here. If elected as Councilmember for Ward 1, it would be my first priority to ensure all areas have the resources they need to prevent violence.

Infrastructure is an important violence prevention tool that is overlooked. Many of our street lights are outdated and non-functioning. We need Council to help provide oversight on the long-delayed DC-wide streetlight replacement program, which will help our streets stay brighter and safer. I want to create an exterior lighting rebate program for homeowners, condominiums, landlords, and small businesses to help deter crimes of opportunity. We have this in place for security cameras and we should have the same for lights.

If elected, I also plan on introducing legislation that addresses and encompasses the findings from the Police Reform Commission. We need a desk audit of MPD to determine if there needs to be less, more, or better oversight on issues with the police department. We also need to conduct an audit of the Community Response Team and Department of Behavioral Health. We can increase funding in each of these areas, but without understanding what is working and what isn’t, we cannot provide the best solutions to curb violence over the short-term.

6. In the 2018 election cycle, voters overwhelmingly voted to raise the minimum wage for tipped workers, but the Council overturned the voters’ decision. In 2022, voters may again be asked if they support raising the minimum wage for tipped workers. If Initiative 82 (One Fair Wage) makes it to the ballot, will you pledge to respect the will of the voters?

I pledge to respect the will of the voters and I believe overturning any voter initiative is an utter failure of elected officials.

7. Most Washingtonians believe that "taxation without representation" is immoral. Yet “permanent residents” who make their homes in DC and pay the same taxes as citizens do not have the right to vote. Ward 1 Councilmember Brianne Nadeau has introduced the Local Resident Voting Rights Act to grant
Sabel Harris  
Ward 1 Council Candidate Questionnaire

those members of our community voting rights in local DC elections, such as Mayor, Council, School Board, and ANC. Do you support this bill?

It took my grandparents, aunts, uncle, and mom 8 years to become US Citizens. During that time, my family didn’t have a say in local matters, whether they wanted to vote for someone who would be making changes for their children’s schooling, if they needed traffic calming measures on their block, or if they needed to fix a long-standing issue on trash. Their voice was effectively muted even though the US was their now permanent home. Although my own personal example is outside of DC, it’s a very similar experience permanent residents and families here face and I support this bill.

I see this issue connected to the legislation that failed to pass to give excluded workers more relief. Many of these permanent residents are also excluded workers, who only received $3,000-$4,000 for the entirety of the pandemic, and currently do not have a vote in who they would like to see represent them and their best interests on Council. These permanent residents are the backbone of our community and we need someone on Council who is willing to advocate with as much vigor on these issues as housing, encampments, and more.

8. Do you support lowering the voting age to 16 years old, as a way to instill the habit of voting in young people and increase turnout?

I do support lowering the voting age to 16 years old; however, this alone will not increase turnout or engagement. It will increase the entire base of voters, but it doesn’t guarantee that they, along with the current voting population, get to the voting booth. Not only should we lower the voting age, but we should increase funding for the Board of Elections to be able to implement the measures in Councilmember Allen’s Elections Modernization Amendment Act of 2021, increase civic education, and get out the vote efforts on local and federal elections.

9. Do you support the “Metro for DC” proposal to provide $100 of free Metro ridership each month for every DC resident?
Sabel Harris
Ward 1 Council Candidate Questionnaire

I do and I believe it is just scratching the surface in transportation equity. If elected, I will ensure that more equitable measures are advocated for and proposed like expanded bus lines and lanes in areas where they are limited and helping to approve the streetcar expansion. Some of these measures may fall outside of Ward 1, but the way we move throughout DC isn’t confined by Ward boundaries and Councilmembers should work to address inequities for all of DC.

10. Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is becoming more popular as a solution to the problem of candidates being elected with less than majority support. RCV is effective in cities and states across the country, and has proven an effective tool for strengthening our democracy. Councilmember Christina Henderson has introduced an RCV bill (the VOICE Act) that has been gaining momentum. Do you plan to support the bill? If not, what are your concerns about the bill and can the bill be changed to address them?

I do plan on supporting this bill because we’ve seen a number of recent candidates elected through a plurality versus a majority.

I have no concerns with the VOICE Act itself, and my only concerns lie with the advocacy, education, and community engagement around RCV. Many supporters and advocates of RCV in DC are well-versed on local government and elections. This leaves out the general population of people who may be swayed by false perceptions or information on RCV. There are many benefits of RCV, but if we do not provide the broader community with this context it won’t help the overall electoral process.

11. Recent reports were critical of the misuse of the Housing Production Trust Fund, including the failure of the administration to target funds for extremely low income residents, as required by law. If elected, what will you do to ensure that the HPTF is used to produce deeply affordable housing in all wards of the city and that the Department of Housing and Community Development is held accountable for doing so?

If elected, I plan on advocating for and helping to implement better Council oversight. Oversight, especially for DHCD, shouldn’t just occur in the first quarter of the year or
through a reaction from something detrimental. The $82 million dollars of misspent funds for deeply affordable units is a huge amount that shouldn't have been overlooked by Council and performance of the DHCD should be assessed on a quarterly basis moving forward to ensure they are on a better path to take care of extremely low income residents.

The Council also needs to better collect and utilize data in a dashboard on where DHCD is using the Housing Production Trust Fund to build units, the breakdown of the MFI on these units, progress on the construction, and the current state of each. This will not only provide transparency on the District’s overall goals for housing, but to identify issues before they become unmanageable problems.