

MINNEAPOLIS CITY COUNCIL APPOINTMENT CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate Name: Enrique Velázquez

Position Title: Director of Regulatory Services

Department: Regulatory Services Department

INSTRUCTIONS

The following questionnaire is intended to gather candidate responses for City Council consideration during the appointment process. There are two sections, the first contains questions posed to all appointed candidates, the second are questions more specific to the respective department's scope of work. Section One is broken into 4 categories, each with three questions. Section Two contains 8 department specific questions. Please ensure you respond to each question asked and aim for thorough but concise responses of roughly 1-3 paragraphs per question and the response field will adjust as you type.

Once completed, responses should be submitted to the City Clerk by the return date noted above. Should a question does not directly apply to your background, briefly explain why and describe the most relevant analogous experience.

QUESTIONS FOR ALL APPOINTED CITY DEPARTMENT HEADS

1) Vision, Challenges, & Opportunities

- a) Please share what attracted you to this role with the City of Minneapolis?
- b) What do you see as the top challenges and opportunities facing this department?
- c) What are your top three priorities for the department to pursue this term? How have these priorities evolved throughout your previous appointments to this role?

Response

What drew me to this role was watching, across previous positions in Public Works and CPED, how deeply City colleagues cared about the communities they served, even when the systems around them made that care hard to deliver. I wanted to lead a department where that care could become the operating standard, not the exception.

Our top challenge is that this work is continually evolving and growing more complex, with rising demand across each dimension of Inspections Services, Animal Care and Control, and a deepening role for Traffic Control within the Public Safety Ecosystem. Each of these places our teams on a critical path, requiring us to get more creative with existing resources to meet growing need without increasing

personnel and further burdening community affordability. Our opportunity lies in that same complexity, using it to build a more integrated, forward-looking model of regulation.

My three priorities this term: evaluating the full housing ecosystem, implementing housing-focused reforms that improve the quality of our housing supply, and stabilizing staffing to support these efforts. Earlier in this current appointment, priorities centered on structural reforms in areas such as Prolonged Vacancy Enforcement and Unsheltered Homelessness. Now the focus has shifted toward sustaining, scaling, and connecting across the full housing landscape.

2) Leadership Style & Management Practices

- a) Describe your leadership style and management philosophy? How do you recognize when staff are engaged and effectively supported?
- b) How do you incorporate continuous improvement into your own management practices, accountability standards, and oversight of senior and mid-level leadership within the department?
- c) As a department leader, how do you promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring, promotion, and department culture?

Response

My leadership philosophy centers people alongside outcomes, both the colleagues doing the work and the communities we serve. I lead with the values our Regulatory Services leadership team established collaboratively: inclusion, transparency, accountability, integrity, people focus, and continuous improvement, and I hold myself and senior leadership accountable to them consistently.

I recognize engagement by staying close to the work itself. Shadow opportunities, ride-alongs, skip-level meetings, and impromptu conversations give me direct insight into what drives colleagues, what challenges them, and what inhibits their ability to do their best work, insight no dashboard alone could provide.

Continuous improvement means taking an earnest, ongoing look at our practices and protocols to ensure community stays centered in how we approach the work. I promote a workplace culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion by examining how we show up in community and identifying where we can stop harm at the earliest possible opportunity, rather than responding only after it has occurred. That lens shapes both how we support colleagues internally and how we serve residents externally.

As a leader, it is my responsibility to challenge conventional wisdom and seek to do things better, faster, differently for the benefit of the community. To achieve this, we need to shrink our blind spots in leadership. This requires diversity of experiences, thoughts, education, and backgrounds. It requires a culture built on trust where people feel welcome to be their authentic selves, are inspired to lead where they are, and bring ideas to the forefront. This is the culture and environment we are building in Regulatory Services. From recruitment to continuous development, we advertise in many areas, so we have diversity of talent from which to draw. We conduct blind candidate scoring and include a member of our Equity & Inclusion Team on panels as ways to mitigate the risk of bias at the earliest opportunity.

3) Organizational Structure, Staffing, & Budget

- a) How do you evaluate the department's existing organizational structure, staffing, and budget priorities? When areas for reform are identified, how do you implement those changes?
- b) What is the Director's role in management of a department's operational budget? Describe your own approach to budget oversight and how you have adapted to any previous budget challenges.
- c) As a department leader, how do you balance budgetary demands between your programmatic and personnel budget?

Response

I evaluate structure by pairing data with frontline feedback. When our reorganization review showed alternative enforcement and housing liaison functions operating in silos, we restructured them into the Inspections Services Division to align accountability, reduce handoffs, and improve service delivery for our residents.

As Director, my role in budget oversight is protecting the people doing the work while making the fiscal case for sustainability. My approach centers on identifying risks (single threads of failure, funding shortfalls, and growing demands that outpace resource capacity) and building the case internally for more durable funding models within an acceptable tolerance. Services should not be so voluminous that residents are priced out of their homes. Conversely, services must align with the present and projected needs of the community. There is a balance between what we can offer and trade-offs that we must negotiate to meet the needs.

Most all of our spending is personnel driven. Even programmatic spending is inclusive of staff responsible for doing the work. I balance personnel and non-personnel budgets by prioritizing colleague capacity first, since every outcome we deliver depends on staffing stability. Non-personnel investment follows, directed toward tools and technology that extend what our colleagues can accomplish rather than replace them. Other non-personnel spending includes contracts for services such as lawn care, board-up services, arborists, and the like to ensure that the City is able to respond when property owners or residents disrupt community livability and do not address their non-compliance within the designated time.

4) Collaboration with City Council & City Government

- a) How does this appointed position fit within the City's government structure, including your relationships with the City Council, Mayor, OPS, OCS, and other City departments? Where does direction come from, where do you bring concerns?
- b) What factors do you believe are critical to building and maintaining a productive working relationship with the City Council? Describe your approach and experience communicating on significant issues, responding to Council concerns, and balancing policy direction with your professional judgment on operations.
- c) How can the City Council better support this role and department?

Response

This role sits at the intersection of policy and operations, translating Council priorities and Mayoral direction into the daily work of housing safety, animal care, and public right-of-way management.

Direction flows from Council and the Mayor's office; I bring operational realities and emerging concerns back through regular engagement with committee members and their staff. This occurs in regular check-ins or in between meetings for our two home committees, Business, Housing & Zoning and Public Health, Safety & Equity.

Building a productive Council relationship requires consistency and transparency, especially when the news is difficult. I prioritize proactive communication on emerging issues before they surface as constituent complaints, and I make myself available to Council members and their offices when they need context on a specific case, policy question, or resident concern in their ward.

Supporting Council's policy development means showing up early, offering operational expertise before decisions are finalized rather than after, so ordinances like Prolonged Vacancy Enforcement reflect what's actually implementable on the ground. On constituent services, I treat every Council referral as a direct line to a resident's lived experience, and I hold my team accountable to responding with the same urgency. Those phone calls or emails are cries for help when our systems have failed. It is our charge to listen, collaborate, and bring closure, where possible, for the resident.

DEPARTMENT SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- 1) What are currently the biggest challenges to the day-to-day operations of Regulatory Services? How do you proactively work to identify these challenges and implement potential solutions to address them?

Response

Our biggest daily challenge is that this work is continually evolving and growing more complex, with rising demand across each dimension of Inspections Services, Animal Care and Control, and a deepening role for Traffic Control within the Public Safety Ecosystem. Each of these places our teams on a critical path, requiring us to get more creative with existing resources to meet growing need without increasing personnel and further burdening community affordability. Our opportunity lies in that same complexity, using it to build a more integrated, forward-looking model of regulation.

I identify these challenges through direct engagement in internal channels such as shadow opportunities, ride-alongs, skip-level meetings, and impromptu conversations that surface what's actually slowing colleagues down before it becomes a crisis. I also read, observe, and engage with peers across the State to find out what they contend with, what looms on the horizon, and difficulties they foresee as we build collaborative approaches together. Solutions follow the same principle: listen, observe, engage, and seek understanding before recommending solutions. We have many smart colleagues, peers, and community members willing to share their insight; we just need to be willing and open to listen, and then do something with what we received so we do not waste their gifts. This is the avenue we undertook while reorganizing Alternative Enforcement and Housing Liaison teams directly, embedding them in Inspections Services. As leaders, we thought this would be an appropriate fit given the work, yet leaned on staff knowledge to shape and guide the conversation. People are open and willing to support an environment they have a hand in shaping.

Proactive identification also means listening to the community itself. We run independent task forces and regular outreach with the community to surface friction points directly from residents and property owners. These lead to solutions that are built with the people experiencing the problem, not around them and not for them.

- 2) In response to current economic challenges, can you describe any potential opportunities to better leverage the use of rental licensing or inspections fee structures to support operational capacity?

Response

Rental licensing and inspections fees should reflect the true cost of the services provided, not shift that burden disproportionately onto the general fund and onto our taxpayers. This Committee's approval of updated fee schedules, including a rental license fee increase aimed at improving cost recovery, is one concrete opportunity we've already begun to leverage.

We have begun to alter work schedules for fire watch at the large stadiums—US Bank, Huntington Bank, and Target Field—so that we maximize staff time without incurring overtime. We intend to renegotiate

contracts for Traffic Control in the coming year so that we recover true costs for their gameday and special events traffic management services.

The same principle applies across our full portfolio of fees: hazardous material permits, fire commercial registrations, vacant building registration, included. As economic pressure grows on both residents and City operations, tying fees more closely to actual cost of services protects operational capacity without asking taxpayers, broadly, to subsidize services that specific property owners and businesses use.

I want to be direct that this is not about fee increases for the sake of growing revenue. It's about sustainability, ensuring the department can continue delivering safe housing standards and public safety services at the pace this city's needs demand.

- 3) Can you describe Regulatory Services' efforts to improve coordinated encampment response efforts with both internal and external partners?

Response

Our Homeless Response Team has expanded beyond outreach alone into helping residents recover lost identification, providing supplies to take care of immediate needs, and conducting intake assessments for those who decide they are ready to work through the Coordinated Entry System. This work happens in deepening partnership with Hennepin County and their service providers, ensuring residents living in spaces deemed unfit for human habitation are connected to shelter, treatment, and housing resources rather than encountering our department as an isolated point of contact.

Internally, this requires tight coordination between our Homeless Response Team, Inspections Services, Traffic Control, Minneapolis Police, Public Health, and Environmental Health so a single encampment response reflects both public health and safety standards and a compassionate, coordinated pathway toward stability. Our team's approach is compassionate and collaborative. This guides every decision we make in this space.

The work ahead includes stabilizing this team's staffing, partnership with Hennepin County, State, and tribal partners to identify a path forward for a tiny village providing culturally responsive support for our unsheltered relatives and continuing to evaluate ways to improve. This is not occurring in a vacuum; we are enlisting the support of a lived experience advisory group for further guidance and clarity around needs and solutions that will enable us to extend our reach.

- 4) How do you prioritize the deployment of limited inspections resources with the continued growth of the City's property portfolio and related increases to demand?

Response

We prioritize Inspections resources using a bifurcated approach. Certain inspectors are allocated to respond to 311 service requests (complaints) while the remainder focus on proactive license inspections. The team focused on proactive inspections is divided between single family-duplex-triplex units (housing inspections) and four-plex and above (fire inspections). In the last year, we added supervisor positions to assist with training, accountability, and continuous improvement so that

managers and directors can focus on high level management, data analysis, and policy gaps. This approach directs the most intensive oversight toward properties and conditions that pose the greatest risk to health and safety, informed by our rental tiering dashboard and violations history. This lets us focus limited capacity where it matters most, rather than spreading resources evenly regardless of risk.

The clearest test of this approach has been folding Minneapolis Public Housing Authority properties into our rental licensing inspections program in 2025, adding more than 700 buildings and over 6,000 rental units without additional staffing or funding. We absorbed that growth by refining our prioritization model further, not by expanding headcount, proving the model can scale, but also showing its limits as more rental properties come online in our renter-dominated market.

It is worth noting that we recognize the feedback from the community and the current rental tier system are incongruent with one another. This is why we are reworking the tiered rental license system, in partnership with a community task force and expect to activate it for Rental License Year 2028.

Long-term, sustainable growth in our inspections capacity will require active partnership in evaluating whether current staffing levels can keep pace with the portfolio and existing policies aimed at increasing and improving renter supports, if we need to augment these needs, or if we need to find a more balanced third option.

- 5) What strategies are critical for Regulatory Service to build and maintain accountable and effective relationships with both tenants and property owners?

Response

Trust with both tenants and property owners starts with consistency and transparency. Publishing our violations dashboard and rental tiering dashboard means any resident or property owner can see the same information we use to make enforcement decisions, reducing the sense that outcomes are arbitrary or enforcement tools are capriciously applied.

For tenants, our Tenant Remedies Action (TRA) process gives renters a real pathway to code compliance when conditions go unaddressed. For property owners, the Prolonged Vacancy Enforcement (PVE) ordinance models the same principle from the other direction: a clear runway to rehabilitate or sell, paired with real consequences for continued neglect.

The throughline for both groups is the same: clear expectations, consistent enforcement, and genuine responsiveness when either a tenant or an owner raises a legitimate concern. Sitting at the center, in between TRA and PVE, we are ready to issue Renter Relocation Assistance when it is provable that the displacement, or pending displacement action, was preventable with proper care and maintenance.

- 6) How do you ensure that messaging and support are delivered consistently across your department and its very distinct scopes of work including inspections, traffic control, and animal care and control?

Response

Inspections, Traffic Control, Animal Care and Control, and Operations and Engagement operate with distinct scopes. Undergirding their areas of focus is a shared values framework our leadership team built collaboratively: inclusion, transparency, accountability, integrity, people focus, and continuous improvement. That shared foundation is what keeps messaging consistent even when the day-to-day work looks entirely different.

Our Operations & Engagement division plays a central coordinating role here, staffing task forces and community touchpoints that span all remaining divisions, ensuring residents receive the same tone and standard of service regardless of which part of the department they're interacting with. I also stay close to frontline realities directly through ride-alongs, skip-level conversations, and engagement with community-focused teams across every division, so I can catch and correct messaging drift before it reaches the public.

Ultimately, consistency comes from clarity of purpose: every division exists to protect the health, safety, and dignity of Minneapolis residents, and that purpose does not change based on which uniform a colleague wears.

- 7) Regulatory Services often works in coordination with other City departments; how do you manage communication and expectations related to the specific role of Regulatory Services?

Response

Regulatory Services routinely coordinates with departments across Public Works, Community Planning, and Economic Development, Office of Community Safety, Minneapolis Health, and Minneapolis Police. Clear expectations start with defining our specific role early in any joint effort. I prioritize direct, proactive communication with counterparts, particularly on initiatives like encampment response and community-identified priorities, where overlapping jurisdictions can create confusion if left undefined.

Where our authority is distinct, we work to define the boundaries of what we can deliver, what we cannot deliver, and what might be in the gray zone, warranting further exploration. Where our work is genuinely shared, I focus on building the same collaborative posture I expect from my own team internally.

Ultimately, our focus is on reducing duplicated effort and preventing residents from being caught between departments and City practices to resolve their issue.

- 8) In addition to what you have already shared - can you identify an area of success and an area that has been challenging for Regulatory Services that you believe are important for the City Council to recognize?

Response

The clearest area of success that is also a challenge to Regulatory Services is finally folding Minneapolis Public Housing Authority properties into our Rental License Tiering program in 2025, a goal I pushed toward since arriving in this department in 2022. It means residents in public housing now receive the

same enforceable safety standard we've long required of private landlords. No additional staffing or funding provided, we do this work because it is the right thing to do.

To be clear, we have a long way to go before achieving ONE housing standard for all Minneapolis residents. Licensing MPHA is one step along this journey for all residents, sheltered and unsheltered, who live in Minneapolis.