EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Chief Executive Officer

THE BEGINNING OF A BIGGER STORY.

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Client:	**Seattle Social Housing Developer**
Role:	**Chief Executive Officer**
Reports To:	**Board of Directors**
Location:	**Seattle, WA**
Website:	seattlesocialhousing.org

SITUATION OVERVIEW:

ZRG has been engaged to recruit a **Chief Executive Officer** for Seattle Social Housing Developer.

ABOUT SEATTLE SOCIAL HOUSING:

Seattle Social Housing Developer (SSHD) is a Public Development Authority focused on addressing the City's housing needs through an innovative social housing model. Created in 2023 with the passage of local ballot initiative I-135, the organization intends to acquire and build high-quality housing that is publicly owned and permanently affordable, sustainable and inclusive for all Seattle residents.

The SSHD is a local government body that operates with an independent staff and board, a model that is a hybrid of a public entity and a traditional non-profit. Building and units owned and operated by SSHD will be public goods.

As a public entity of Seattle funded by public dollars, SSHD is accountable to all residents in Seattle. SSHD is governed by a 13-member board appointed by:

- Seattle City Council
- Seattle Mayor
- Seattle Renters' Commission
- MLK Labor
- Green New Deal Oversight Board

In addition to having nonprofit, finance, planning and other expertise, a majority are required to represent a range of incomes and be renters. Eventually, social housing tenants will make up just over half of the SSHD Board. When the terms of the board member seats appointed by the Seattle Renters' Commission expire, those Board seats will be elected directly by the residents of social housing.

Seattle Social Housing Developer aims to provide housing to low- and middle-income households who are rent-burdened, can't afford market-rate housing, but earn too much to qualify for affordable housing.

MISSION

Their mission is to develop, own, lease, and maintain mixed-income housing that is permanently affordable, owned as a public asset forever, and designed for people priced out of market-rate housing.

Social housing exists in various forms throughout the world to provide secure and affordable housing for people at a range of incomes. In their Seattle model, housing will be publicly owned in perpetuity and offer long-term affordability that creates stable living environments, promotes social equity, and prevents displacement.

THE OPPORTUNITY

SSHD offers an unusually consequential leadership opportunity. Seattle is attempting to establish publicly owned, permanently affordable, mixed-income social housing at a scale that has few direct parallels in the United States. The next CEO will therefore have the opportunity to help define a model that could influence housing policy well beyond Seattle.

SSHD has a dedicated tax revenue stream of approximately $130MM/yr. which the organization plans to double through municipal bonding for investing in additional real estate development projects.

In 2026, SSHD purchased its first building with 150 units, with four more purchases planned, one before the end of 2026, and three more in 2027, for a total of 1,020 units.

The organization also plans to purchase its first development site in 2026, adding five more in 2027. The first two projects will start construction in 2027.

That opportunity brings substantial expectations. SSHD must deploy public resources quickly enough to demonstrate results while resisting pressure to grow faster than its organizational infrastructure can responsibly support. It must build housing while simultaneously building the institution responsible for preserving that housing for generations.

POSITION:

SSHD is at an inflection point. The organization has moved beyond start-up and is now responsible for translating an ambitious public mandate into a durable, high-performing social housing institution. Reporting to the Seattle Social Housing Board of Directors, the CEO's primary responsibility will be to bring greater strategic and operational maturity to the organization over the next 18 – 24 months, while maintaining the urgency, innovation, and resident-centered values that led to SSHD's creation.

Ultimately, the opportunity is larger than building a portfolio of housing. The next CEO has the opportunity to help establish a financially sustainable, professionally operated, politically durable, publicly trusted institution capable of owning thousands of permanently affordable homes for future generations of Seattle residents.

POSITION DESCRIPTION:

LEADERSHIP

- Establish both political and financial sustainability. SSHD has received significant public investment, but its long-term success cannot depend on the continuation of a single funding source or the support of a particular political moment.
- Champions and protects tax revenue from the voter-approved local proposition by ensuring SSHD delivers on the promise of social housing.
- Maintain strong relationships with the Mayor's Office, City Council, state and regional partners, organized labor, and Seattle's broader civic community while developing a long-term strategy for diversified and sustainable funding.
- Establish political durability. The organization was created by voters and operates in a dynamic political environment. Elected leadership, budget conditions, and public priorities will change. The next CEO must broaden support for SSHD so that the institution's future is not dependent upon individual political leaders or a particular moment in Seattle politics.
- SSHD is simultaneously balancing resident power, public accountability, affordability, financial sustainability, professional property operations, labor relationships, environmental objectives, and rapid growth. Those priorities will not always align neatly. The CEO will be responsible for setting priorities when faced with the competing tensions inherent to SSHD's mission.

ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT

- Continue SSHD's transition from a rapidly formed start-up into a mature public institution. Strengthen executive accountability, organizational systems, internal controls, technology, risk management, performance reporting, and the relationship between the CEO and staff.
- Motivate and inspire SSHD's high-performing team, providing leadership, training, and mentoring to the staff. Attract, retain, and reward best-in-class talent to continue to

strengthen the organization. The CEO sets the cultural environment for SSHD and must create and nurture an environment of trust and belonging.

- Continue to strengthen the organization through a strategic approach to building the org chart and bringing in impactful new hires.
- Build a strong relationship with the board: as the current board transitions from a working board to a governing body, and as open Board seats are filled with SSHD residents, there is an opportunity for the CEO to develop a comprehensive strategy around board engagement.
- Create a culture of transparency in reporting that supports strong relationships with staff, the board, residents, and the broader public.
- Foster a culture of transparency, accountability, and continuous learning where mistakes or harm are acknowledged, lessons are applied, and the organization adapts accordingly.
- Continue to develop systems that can scale with the portfolio rather than repeatedly building new processes as the organization grows.
- Oversee the organization's budget (projected tax revenue to be approximately $130M annually).

GROWTH

- Oversee execution of the SSHD real estate strategy, including both acquisitions and ground-up development.
- The CEO must balance growth with impact; all properties owned by SSHD should be supported by appropriate underwriting, asset management, capital planning, compliance, and organizational infrastructure.
- Cultivate and leverage funding sources at both the organizational and individual property level. Lead capital attraction efforts that support SSHD's mission, growth, and long-term financial sustainability, including leveraging dedicated tax revenues through municipal bonds and other public financing tools to expand the capital available for the acquisition and development of social housing.
- Build the organizational infrastructure, financial discipline, reporting, and accountability necessary to establish SSHD's creditworthiness, achieve a strong bond rating, and effectively access municipal and other public financing.

ASSET MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

- Hold P&L responsibility for each individual property, ensuring they are operated in a way that is financially sound, well-maintained, effectively managed, and delivering a strong resident experience.
- Ensure that delivery of property operations is accountable to SSHD and centers the experience of its residents. The property management discipline is currently outsourced to

third-party managers. Determine when and if the organization brings all or part of this discipline in-house.

- Resident participation is fundamental to SSHD's identity. Translate SSHD's commitment to residents into an effective operating model by building governance structures that provide residents meaningful influence while maintaining clear accountability, strong property operations, legal compliance, and the fiduciary responsibilities of a public organization. Successfully operationalizing that balance could become one of SSHD's most important contributions to the broader social housing movement.

QUALIFICATIONS:

EXPERIENCE

- Experience with progressively increasing levels of responsibility at an organization, company, department or campaign. The ideal candidate will have 10+ years of experience and a background in a related area (housing, public policy, planning, social impact, community empowerment, government, economic development).
- Brings the political savvy, communication skills, integrity and gravitas to lead a high-profile, public agency.
- Must bring political acumen and demonstrated success working with elected officials, navigating government decision-making, securing public resources, building coalitions, and leading organizations through changing political environments. Existing knowledge of Seattle's political, governmental, housing, labor, and civic environment while not required, would bring a significant advantage.
- Brings an understanding of the complexity, tensions and politics that form around housing in high-cost metros, and who can continue to build durable support for social housing across elected leadership, labor, housing advocates, community organizations, philanthropy, and the business community.
- The strongest candidate will bring a combination of executive leadership, political sophistication, real estate and financial acumen, operational scaling experience, and coalition-building ability.
- Substantial experience with affordable housing, public-private development, acquisitions, asset management, or a comparable capital-intensive enterprise is important. The CEO must have enough financial and real estate sophistication to challenge assumptions, evaluate investments, understand portfolio performance, and effectively lead experienced development and finance executives.
- SSHD's mandate reaches across several related yet distinct functional areas, including real estate development, asset management, property operations, finance, public relations and resident services. The CEO should be comfortable leading large teams across multiple disciplines.

- Experience scaling organizations or operating platforms will also be particularly valuable. Candidates who have built or transformed property management, real estate operations, or other complex service-delivery platforms should receive serious consideration given SSHD's anticipated growth and potential transition to in-house property management.

CULTURAL ATTRIBUTES

- Passion for social housing and SSHD's mission.
- The successful CEO should be mission-driven but operationally grounded: They must believe in the promise of social housing while recognizing that strong property performance, financial discipline, compliance, accountability, and execution are what will ultimately sustain that mission.
- Politically astute without being politically captured. Ability to build strong relationships across constituencies while maintaining the independence and credibility of the institution.
- Bring a mixture of pragmatism and political savvy. Ability to listen well and build consensus but also be willing to make difficult decisions when consensus is unachievable. The right leader will also be comfortable with ambiguity and constructive tension.
- Must bring both an entrepreneurial mindset with an institution-building orientation. SSHD still needs creativity, urgency, and willingness to challenge conventional approaches. It now also needs the systems, discipline, accountability, and consistency required of a permanent public institution.
- The CEO should have an orientation towards housing justice and a desire to center the resident experience.
- Highly developed listening, written, and oral communication skills with an ability to "tell the story" and articulate a clear and compelling vision for social housing in Seattle.
- Practices humility in leadership. Brings a strong foundation in conflict management and principles of restorative justice. Has the ability to say "I was wrong".
- Has both the flexibility and the imagination to bring a new model of housing to Seattle and the United States.

COMPENSATION:

The salary range is **$285,000** to **$365,000** per year. Seattle Social Housing Developer offers a competitive benefits package that includes medical and dental coverage, generous PTO, childcare reimbursement, and an option to enroll in the Washington State Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) Plan 2 or Plan 3.

PROCESS

ZRG Partners has been retained to provide recruitment services to SSHD. ZRG is proud to provide SSHD with a rigorous and patented assessment platform grounded in data and analytics. The process includes the following:

1. Candidates interested in applying for the CEO role should send their resume to SSHDCEO@zrgpartners.com by October 31, 2026. Resumes received by October 31, 2026, will receive first consideration. Recruiting will remain open until the position is filled.
2. ZRG Partners will contact qualified candidates to schedule an initial interview with ZRG.
3. ZRG will recommend candidates to the SSHD Hiring Committee for further evaluation.
4. Finalist candidates advance to second and third-round interviews.
5. ZRG Partners will conduct a formal referencing.
6. Board of Directors will approve an offer for the successful candidate.

All questions should be directed to SSHDCEO@zrgpartners.com.

SEATTLE SOCIAL HOUSING DEVELOPER IN THE NEWS:

September 8, 2026
Can Social Housing Deliver? Los Angeles and Seattle Pursue Two Distinct Paths

July 15, 2026
Take a tour of Seattle's first ever social housing building

June 9, 2026
Seattle's first social housing building draws more than 10K applicants

May 22, 2026
Seattle's first social housing building

ABOUT ZRG PARTNERS:

ZRG is a global talent advisory firm that is changing the way companies hire and manage talent. ZRG's data-driven approach to executive and professional search has been changing the way clients think about how to find top talent. The company's digital Zi platform combines talent intelligence, candidate insights, and process improvement to dramatically deliver executive searches quicker and with proven better results.

Sarah Dunn
Managing Director
sdunn@zrgpartners.com

Based in the Bay Area, Sarah Dunn is a Managing Director in the Real Estate Practice at ZRG Partners and leads the firm's Affordable Housing Practice. Prior to joining ZRG, Sarah served as a

Managing Director at Terra Search Partners, where she led research and executive search outreach efforts.

Earlier in her career, Sarah was the first Chief Talent Officer at HR&A Advisors, a leading real estate advisory firm serving public and private sector clients. In that role, she focused on leadership development, recruitment, and organizational strategy.

She is actively involved in the community, serving as a Past Board Chair of the Oakland Parks & Recreation Foundation and currently as Vice Chair of Membership for the Urban Land Institute Affordable & Workforce Housing Council.

Link to complete bio for Sarah Dunn.

BJ Davis
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BJ Davis is a mission-driven executive leader and consultant with more than 25 years of experience in nonprofit leadership, executive search, fundraising, and systems change. She has served as an Executive Director twice and co-founded two nonprofits, including the Orange County Equality Coalition, a leading force for marriage equality in Southern California. She has held executive leadership roles with DigDeep, the Hetrick-Martin Institute, Astraea Foundation, and Earth Care, where she led organizational growth initiatives that secured tens of millions in philanthropic support, including a $15 million gift from MacKenzie Scott.

Most recently, BJ served as a Senior Executive Search Consultant with DRiWaterstone Human Capital, where she led more than 20 executive searches for CEOs, senior leaders, and directors across nonprofits, associations, and social impact organizations. She has advised boards and executives on governance, succession planning, and leadership strategy, with a focus on advancing diverse leadership talent and ensuring equitable, values-aligned search processes.

As a trained CliftonStrengths practitioner, BJ partners with organizations and leaders to clarify priorities, build high-performing teams, and link people and purpose for lasting impact. She holds a Master of Social Work from the University of Vermont and a Bachelor of Science in Sociology from Radford University.

Link to complete bio for BJ Davis.