



Durham for All Questionnaire for Mayor and City Council Candidates - 2019

Name: Joshua Gunn

Position sought: Durham City Council at-large

Along with our coalition partners, Durham for All has been working on a People First Policy that would leverage the city's incentive programs to support equitable development (see attached). What do you think of the policy? As a council member, what kind of projects would you choose to incentivize, and why?

I think the People First Policy is a wonderful step in creating a Durham that works for us all. As Vice President of the Durham Chamber of Commerce, I have spent the past three years demystifying Economic Development, specifically the incentive process with people throughout our community, championing a way that we can use our incentive process to help create a better, more inclusive and equitable Durham. For so long, incentives and economic development in general have been viewed as an adversary to social justice, and to the cause of racial and economic equity; however, I believe as your People First policy states, we can leverage economic incentives to ensure that we are creating jobs and opportunities that work for everyone. Incentives do require us as citizens, and those in government to hold developers and corporations accountable, and being invested in this way enables us to do so. It has been my experience that our community is losing out on jobs and opportunities due to a lack of engagement between city officials and the private sector, as well as a general philosophy that our council is not "open for business." I recognize that we must protect the interests of our citizens, especially those most vulnerable, but I do believe we need a better approach. I align with this People First Policies intentions, and would only seek to provide a balance, and business related expertise to ensure that this policy can be successful, and not serve to further alienate the business community from bringing opportunities to Durham. As a council member, I would seek to incentivize opportunities that bring jobs to Durham across several business verticals, education levels and pay scales. I believe an economy rich in opportunity and choice is essential to becoming an equitable Durham, and businesses can be an ally to this cause; we just need to work together and put people over politics.

Do you support the \$95 million affordable housing bond that will be on the ballot this November? Why or why not? As rents and housing values rise, how can we ensure that everyone has access to a safe and affordable home?

I believe affordable housing is a crucial component to achieving the high quality of life that we dream for all Durhamites. I believe it is also one of our most urgent issues to address in Durham right now. I fully support an effort to create a more diverse and affordable housing mix in Durham, however I do not believe the current version of the \$95 Million affordable housing bond achieves that. I think the current bond overemphasizes downtown, and assumes that individuals in search of affordable housing want to live in the city's core, rather than in neighborhoods of their choosing. Job Proximity is a critical piece of a person's decision on where they live, especially people with limited resources. We haven't yet created a diverse mix of jobs downtown, meaning that many residents of these new affordable housing communities, may be further inconvenienced by driving longer distances to work. We also haven't created grocers, restaurants, childcare, and other amenities in our city's core that will serve diverse income levels. We haven't addressed the transit needs to effectively get people in and out of downtown from our major employment centers, which today are in areas like RTP, Southpoint, Northern Durham and Western Durham areas. We are approaching this backwards, and my fear as a member of the Durham community is that it will be a failure without proper planning and perspective; with roughly 3 months to go, there are just too many questions to answer and we can't afford to rush a decision like this. Land in our downtown core is the most expensive in the city, and we could, by taking a holistic approach to economic development, create a comprehensive strategy that not only returns maximum value for that land back to the city, but that also leverages those returns to create affordable housing all around our city; in areas where the dollar will go much further, and with less of a burden placed on Durhamites as tax payers. The current policy feels fragmented, and views affordable housing in a silo, rather than as a crucial component to our overall economic strategy. People of all income levels deserve to choose where they want to live, and we should fight to ensure that we all have options; not simply telling someone where they must go. To achieve this level of choice we have to not only address affordability, we must address employment, education, safety, transit and all of the contributing factors to Quality of life in Durham. As a council member I will work with my colleagues, businesses, educators, institutions and all Durhamites to create a comprehensive economic strategy that addresses these factors and ensures that Durhamites can not only afford their homes, but that they can afford for themselves the quality of life, and preserve our right to self-determination.

The proposed redevelopment of the Durham Housing Authority properties will have an enormous impact on Durham's public housing communities. How will you ensure that public housing residents, who will be directly impacted by this bond, have a seat at the decision-making table throughout the entire redevelopment process?

I believe that Durham's public housing residents should be engaged at every level of decision making in our community. I have several family members who are currently in public housing, many of whom have been for most of their lives. I have seen and experienced the challenges that living in poverty can bring, as well as the general feeling of isolation they've expressed to me. We must engage neighborhood organizations, and create a coalition of Durham's public housing residents, and as a council, do the work of ensuring we give them a voice. I am sensitive to the moments where politicians will try and tokenize

poor people for their own gain, by creating public forums where grievances are aired, then not actually taking those grievances into consideration when policies are passed. We must stop this, and we can by electing people to office who have deep ties to Durham, and the communities that are most vulnerable in our city. As a fourth generation Durhamite, these communities that are so often referenced in political discussions, are very closely engrained in my life and my family. They aren't ideas or concepts to me, they are real, and I've grown up deeply in touch with the people living real lives in these communities. I've seen both the impacts that poverty can have, but also the pride, dignity and hope that exists even amidst the most extreme circumstances. I know how much Durham's future matters to my family, and people throughout our city. It is that lens that I will bring to council, and my life's work to advocate for those who's voice are often ignored.

The Rental Assistance Demonstration (or RAD) program contains protections to prevent displacement and protect the rights of residents, but these rights have not always been implemented or enforced. What actions will you take to ensure the rights of public housing residents, especially the right to return? By “right to return,” we mean the right of all residents who may be rehoused or displaced during redevelopment to move back into the redeveloped communities.

It is our responsibility to enforce and protect RAD. I will ensure that the public is properly engaged in this process and that our elected officials are doing the work to ensure its enforcement.

This spring, the city’s community development department recommended ending the longtime homeowners’ grant for longtime, low-income homeowners who have experienced an increase in property taxes. What are your thoughts about this? How can the city support low-income homeowners in the face of rising property values?

I would not support ending the longtime homeowner's grant, as I believe preserving people's right to remain in their communities is essential. I do recognize however, a need to continue to evolve our strategy, and I would explore creative approaches to leveraging our business incentive practices to create funds for longtime homeowners to offset the property tax increases. As Vice President of the Chamber, I participated in a recruitment process for a major employer and we worked through a scenario where this employer was willing to set aside some of their tax incentive dollars (rather than keeping them) into a fund that would help to offset many of the affordability concerns that a growing economy brings, including rising property taxes. We were not able to bring this employer to Durham, but we believe that similar scenarios are possible, to collaborate with our business community as a partner in this cause. We must move beyond outdated political processes, that rely to heavily on an academic lens, and begin to engage all members of our community for real, pragmatic solutions to our housing issues.

This May, Durham residents voted on how the city spends \$2.4 million through a participatory budgeting (PB) process. Did you vote in PB? If so, which projects did you vote for, and why? If not, why not?

I did not vote in this year's Participatory budgeting process.

Would you support running PB again? If not, why not? If so, what would you do differently, what would you keep the same, and how much money would you allocate towards the next round of participatory budgeting?

I would support running a participatory budget again, I believe it is a great way to democratize spending in our city and to ensure that all people have a voice at the table. I would like to see a greater effort in engaging people throughout Durham in the process, I believe this would require moving beyond the usual social media and digital campaigns; as well as expanding the in-person strategy beyond events in the city, and making it a priority to ensure that Durham people determine what they get to vote for, not just choosing from a list of narrowed down options once-a-year. We should make all aspects of city budgeting, including those that don't end up on a PB ballot, participatory in the sense that we work daily to get public feedback so we know what the issues are and how we can properly allocate resources to address them; not based on our own political leanings or ideology, but based on what the people who elected us need.

PB is one example of how elected officials can democratize the powers of their office. If you are elected, what is another example of how you would share your power and give more people in the community the ability to make decisions that directly impact them?

As I addressed in my response to the Affordable Housing bond question, I believe giving people input into where they live is so important. We are being asked to support an affordable housing bond, with sites already pre-determined, rather than opening up the public process to people most impacted by this bond, and identifying places and communities where people want to live. This process will take longer, and will require significant effort on the part of city officials, but if we are serious about lifting voices for all of Durham, we must do that work.

This spring, Durham Beyond Policing led a community coalition in opposing police chief Davis' proposed increase of 72 new police officers over three years (subsequently reduced to 18). In June, council voted to remove funding for increased policing from the 2019-'20 city budget, and instead to raise pay for part-time city workers to \$15.64 an hour. What are your thoughts on this decision?

I am in support of new strategies for community safety, and have a great deal of respect for the work of Durham Beyond Policing. I think we should work together with Chief Davis and law enforcement to

continue to ensure our city is safe, and that our most vulnerable communities aren't unfairly targeted or occupied by law enforcement. I do however take pause with the decision not to allocate the appropriate resources to Chief Davis. We recruited her to our city to help improve our police department, and lead us towards more community oriented police practices. She has done tremendous work in changing the culture in at DPD, and is serious about the task of eliminating bias, teaching de-escalation techniques rather than violence, and addressing the glaring racial disparities in law enforcement. Chief Davis is doing the work, but she has a long way to go, and it is my belief that we should support her in that effort. I don't think we have to abandon a strategy that would evolve our public safety approach to do that. From a fundamental standpoint, our city is growing, the police provide more than just crime prevention/investigation services, but they are also a community resource for traffic issues, accidents, changing a flat tire for a stranded motorist or simply helping people get across a crosswalk; in a growing city, it makes sense that we would need more officers to address a bigger populations needs. On a more serious issue, our city is facing one of its most violent years in a decade, with an alarming murder rate that we must address. I have friends that are losing family members, fellow musicians that have experienced loss to both the streets and criminal justice system, and have spoken with mothers who's children were killed too soon; this is a very real crisis in our city. We should be working with Chief Davis and community organizing groups to address this, not leaving her on an island to fight this battle alone. I support the \$15.64 minimum wage increase, but also would support additional funding for Chief Davis, to at least give her what she needs to do the job we recruited her for; it's up to all of us to keep Durham safe, and we must be fully committed to this work. You don't have to look far into my music to know that I have a challenging history with police, and recognize that my community, communities of color are most often targeted, harassed, and even murdered by law enforcement. I have been a community advocate against police, and will continue to do so nationwide where departments are doing more harm than good. I don't think has to be one of those cities, and I believe we have the right leadership in place to make sure we are not; let's support her.

Durham Beyond Policing has also urged the city to fund a community-based wellness and safety task force “empowered to research and propose viable, cost-effective, long-term solutions to violence and harm” that do not rely on increased policing. Would you support creating and funding such a task force? Why or why not?

I absolutely support creating a fund for community based wellness and safety. I don't think this is an "either/or" proposition; I believe we can fund our current law enforcement agencies, and continue to encourage them to employ better tactics for community safety. I don't think they can do it alone however, and I believe creating task force like this can be monumental, and help us move towards sustainable solutions to the cause of public safety.

This Spring, Duke’s decision to oppose the Durham-Orange Light Rail effectively killed the project. What’s your plan for affordable transit in our city and region given that the light rail proposal is no longer in play?

As Vice President at the Durham Chamber I was an active participant in many of the conversations that revolved around the Durham-Orange Light Rail project. It's worth noting that placing the blame at Duke's feet is an unfair characterization of the process. There were many mistakes made along the way, and Duke does not shoulder that blame alone. The plan, while a decade or more in the making, failed to address many of the issues that were addressed by countless stakeholders and not to mention, its costs continued to rise, raising into question the overall viability of the project. I am far from an expert on transit, but I am a very passionate Durhamite, and I brought that lens to every discussion I had about transit. Questions like "who is this for?", "where does it actually go?" and "what will be the impact on neighborhoods by this type of development?" were things that came to my mind. The more I leaned into those conversations, it quickly felt like a project that was being forced on our community, without actually addressing the needs we currently face; I am however still in support of an affordable transit solution for our city and our region, so what does that look like?

The Chamber convened a group of government and business leaders for a trip to Richmond, VA earlier this year. Richmond, a city of similar demographics, economics and population to Durham; recently deployed a Bus Rapid Transit system. The Chamber team went to see just how well it worked, and brought back glowing reviews. Bus Rapid Transit is not simply more busses on the road, but a sophisticated hybrid of bus and rail, and has solved many of the traffic and mobility issues that Richmond faced. BRT is also far more affordable than light rail, and can be deployed faster and at a fraction of the cost to light rail. Conversely, I visited Long Beach California this year, a community slightly larger than Durham, but about the same size as the Durham-Orange combined MSA; Long Beach deployed a light rail, and hasn't seen as much success in terms of ridership and affordability. As a council member I will advocate for more creative approaches to transit in the long run, and for Bus Rapid Transit as our more immediate solution for not only our city but for the entire triangle region.

Currently, North Carolina state law forbids local governments from establishing higher minimum wages than the state minimum and forbids local government from signing collective bargaining agreements with public-sector unions. If Durham could set a higher minimum wage, would you do so, and what would it be? Do you believe that public sector workers should be allowed to collectively bargain? Why or why not?

I would certainly advocate for a higher minimum wage, as well as the right for public sector workers to collectively bargain. We should work to ensure a high standard of living for all people, and preserve the right to self-determination for all people, in Durham and worldwide.

Do you support LGBTQ+ equality, including marriage equality and LGBTQ+ non-discrimination laws? Do you support a woman's right to choose? If so, what would you do in office to support LGBTQ+ and women's rights?

I am not only a supporter of LGBTQ+ equality, I am a strong advocate for non discrimination laws, marriage equality and a persons right to be there most authentic self. I fully support a woman's right to choose. In office, I would use my platform to create safe spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals and fully support

any legislation that improves the safety and quality of life of people with multiple intersecting identities, as well as legislation that further emboldens a woman's right to choose, and ensure that it cannot be threatened in the future.