



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

Name: Jillian Johnson

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 strongly believe that any public investment in private development should require commitments to provide community benefits like those laid out in the People First Policy. I would choose to support incentives for small local businesses that pay living wages, hire locally, provide jobs to people who are formerly incarcerated, provide training and advancement potential, and provide culturally relevant services to our communities. Because the city is preempted by state law from raising the minimum wage or requiring that employers provide certain benefits, these agreements are some of the few concrete ways that we can boost the quality of jobs in our city. Over the last few years, the council has begun to ask developers on an ad-hoc basis about their plans for living wages, fair benefits, local hiring, etc., but this process will be greatly improved by integrating these questions into the incentive application process.

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?

Yes, I enthusiastically support the \$95M housing bond, and will be encouraging all Durham residents to vote for the bond this fall. This bond proposal is a bold and necessary step toward providing affordable homes for thousands of Durhamites in the context of rapidly-increasing rents and home prices. We lack the regulatory tools that many other cities have used (i.e. inclusionary zoning, rent stabilization, progressive property taxation, etc.) to generate funds for affordable homes, so the bond is our best option to have an impact on our housing crisis. It will help fund a number of initiatives to ensure that everyone

has access to a safe and affordable home - creation of new multi-family rental housing, preservation of existing multi-family rental housing, eviction & homelessness diversion programs, repairs and weatherization programs, and home ownership programs. We will also continue to invest the public money from the dedicated housing fund into these initiatives.

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’m committed to advocating for DHA tenants to be engaged at every step of the redevelopment process, and as the council liaison to the DHA board, I’m in a good position to do so. The DHA admin has hosted a number of community meetings already to explain the plans and process of RAD conversion to tenants, but I am concerned by the lack of organized representation of tenants in the process. I hope that DHA residents councils or other organized tenant groups will become more active during this process, and I’ll do everything I can to support them.

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.

RAD is the first housing program of this type to require 1:1 replacement of public housing units and a guaranteed right to return for tenants. The DHA has publicly committed to respecting both of these rules as they redevelop our public housing committees. As the council liaison to the DHA board, I’ll be in a good position to ensure that these commitments are respected. In some communities, it will be possible to rehouse tenants on-site while work is happening. Unfortunately in some other communities, residents will have to relocate off-site during redevelopment. There’s no way to guarantee that residents will choose to return, and in other cities many residents have chosen not to do so. But I commit to making sure that they have the opportunity to do so and removing as many barriers as possible for them to return.

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 support continuing to provide grants to these homeowners to offset their taxes, because there are no other ways in which the city can have an impact on rising tax burdens on low-income homeowners while continuing to meet our financial needs. But I also agree with staff that this program is not the best way to support low-income homeowners. I support continuing city investments in rehabilitation and weatherization programs for low-income residents, which provide a much greater benefit to residents with lower administrative costs.

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 voted for the following projects:

Technology for DPS Schools - there aren't many ways for the city to support the public school district, so I like to take advantage of them when they come around

Bus shelters - a quality transit system is critical to our growing region and is especially important to low-income residents who may not have access to their own vehicles.

Solar powered wifi picnic shelters - would have provided wifi to public housing communities, lessening the digital divide.

LGBTQ Youth Center - because the LGBTQ Center of Durham is doing fabulous work in the community and supporting youth is very important to me.

Accessible Ramps - to support low-income disabled homeowners.

Carroll St Park Improvements - this park is around the corner from my house and doesn't have any play equipment.

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?

Yes, I support continuing to run PB every two years with \$2.4M as is currently allocated in our long-term capital budget. I would like to change the next cycle by making voting happen in April rather than May to make it easier to partner with DPS, provide more on the ground organizing support during idea collection & voting, and maintain more regular communication with residents about the status of their ideas/proposals in the pipeline.

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?

My platform (joint with Javiera Caballero & Charlie Reece) includes a number of ideas for increasing equitable and democratic community engagement, including creating a citywide community assembly process to provide regular forums for engagement in different neighborhoods. Other ideas to expand access to city decision-making are online in English at jillianfordurham.com/platform and in Spanish at jillianfordurham.com/plataforma.

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 voted to remove funding for new officers from this year's budget because there's no evidence that Durham needs more officers. Police response times and calls for service are both down, and despite a spike when compared to last year, which had one of the lowest crime rates recorded, crime in Durham is on a long-term downward trend. While increased policing has not been shown to have a long-term impact on community safety, providing more resources to crime prevention and intervention, as well as to meet basic community needs, has been shown to have a significant impact on community safety. Put simply, the safest communities don't have the most cops, they have the most resources.

I supported the pay increase for part-time workers, and am glad that this work will now be recognized with pay equity with full-time employees. As a city that advocates on the state and national level for a \$15/hr minimum wage, we have a responsibility to make sure that our own employees make that wage as well.

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?

Yes, I support creating a community task force to work with residents, community organizations, and the police department to research and recommend violence prevention and intervention strategies that do not increase policing. It is my hope that such a task force would play a vital role in the planning and implementation of an on-call crisis response system separate from law enforcement, which is part of my community safety platform (www.jillianfordurham.com/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?

Given that there is no longer the possibility for light rail, GoDurham is developing new plans for how to use our transit tax to build a regional transit system that relies heavily on bus transit. Though not as efficient as light rail, I hope that increasing access to bus transportation will be able to meet our regional transportation needs. A silver lining is that this frees up some resources that we can use to expand local transit options. I’m looking forward to receiving a plan from GoTriangle this year to expand local service and will support their efforts to do so. We’re also continuing to keep fares at \$1 and funding shortfalls in the transit budget with additional tax revenue.

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?

Yes, I believe the minimum wage should be \$15/hr and I support the right of public sector workers to collectively bargain. Every worker deserves to make enough to meet their basic needs, and the right to organize and collectively bargain shouldn’t depend on who a person’s employer is.

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?

Yes, as a member of the LGBTQ community, I am a long-term supporter of equal rights and liberation for LGBTQ people and support comprehensive non-discrimination policies that include protection for sexual orientation and gender identity. Durham is currently preempted from passing a comprehensive nondiscrimination ordinance by HB142, but if this law expires without being replaced, I will work with other cities to pass comprehensive non-discrimination policies.

I also support the right to legal, safe abortion. As a council member, I supported a resolution calling for the repeal of the Hyde Amendment, which prevents government employees from accessing abortion services. I also serve as the council liaison to the Women’s Commission, and I plan to continue to help them achieve their mission to improve the lives of women and girls in the Durham community.