



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

Name: Daniel Meier

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 would support projects that bring a wide range of jobs and opportunities to Durham. It's great that we get the high-tech jobs coming into RTP, but we also need to make sure we get the small businesses and the lower-scale jobs as well. We want to incentivize projects that help Durham from top to bottom, not just those at the top.

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 support it, but I also don't like that it doesn't address the root cause of the problems, which is lack of ownership. It's great to keep rents affordable, but if you really want to help people build wealth, and be able to stay in their communities, the answer is ownership, not rent. It's a huge problem when people live in a house for years or decades, paying rent all the time, but have no equity, and no ability to take advantage of rising property values, nor do they have an ability to resist gentrification, since their landlord just needs to cancel their lease and evict them. We need to focus on low-cost mortgages or rent-to-own programs, not simply keep an entire class of renters.

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?

Seek their participation in meetings and community events. Make sure the communities are informed of what is going on, and make sure DHA has a mechanism to listen to those concerns and require DHA to address 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.

Again, I think we need to work to shift the focus from Rent to Ownership. That being said, I would make sure that we hold our City Employees and agencies to their promises and their jobs. We have these rules in place, we need to make sure they are enforced.

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 think we need to look at income exemptions or deductions for low-income homeowners. We need to work hard to expand and encourage ownership, not simply try to convert everyone into renters.

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, and I supported the afterschool program, the LGBTQ+ Youth Center, the Accessible Ramps, and the increased technology. I supported those programs because the more after school programs and technology programs we can fund/create, the better prepared our youth are to compete, the more likely they are for higher education, and it helps keep kids off the street. I supported the Youth Center and Accessible ramps because everyone needs to feel welcome in Durham, and part of feeling welcome is being able to access everything Durham has to offer.

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 think Participatory Budgeting is a good thing, but it also needs to be narrowed so that there is adequate, and ongoing, funding for all of the projects selected. If all projects are selected, there aren't enough funds to go around. Before I can decide how much I would allocate towards the next round, I would have to take a look at the proposed/current budget and see what is a realistic amount, but I do think we need it.

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?

Well, I think the first thing I would do is keep reminding people to vote. Turnout will probably be around 10% for the City Council election, which is sad. The best way for people to take back power and give people the ability to influence decisions that directly impact them is for them to vote.

Other than that, keep an open ear, make sure they are well informed about meetings and projects, and give them a mechanism to have their voices heard and influence the decision-makers.

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 don't like how we pretend it's an either/or decision. The City could have afforded both, and we need to stop pretending there is a conflict between spending on police and spending on other community initiatives.

Violent crime is rising in Durham, that's a concern. The population is also increasing. We need to separate the issues of "policing" with the inequities in the justice system based on race and income. Durham is making strides in that area, and I think we need to make sure we have adequate police working the streets to help keep the communities safe. The Community Engagement Unit is expanding, which is a good thing. No one wants to return to the days of too many stops, and over-policing, but we need to make sure we have adequate police to maintain a presence and keep the focus on violent crime. We also need to stop making it an either/or decision. We can invest in adequate policing AND the community and living wages and programs to help reduce overall crime.

I believe we should have added the officers and raised the pay.

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 believe we should do both. Yes, I support that. The problem we have right now is the focus is on demonizing police (and blaming them for the mass incarceration and others problems in the justice system), as well as dragging national problems into Durham, even when they don't apply. Then we try to paint it as a "well, the police are against these other solutions." They aren't - the police would be on board with those solutions as well. In the short-term, we need to work on increased policing, but that doesn't mean we don't keep looking to long-term solutions that help greatly decrease the need for policing. If we can get the violence and crime under control, we need less police, but with the 17% spike in violent crime, we need to do something now to help control it as we also find longer-term alternatives.

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?

I think light-rail can still come back in some iteration, but it needs to be regional, and not so narrow. In the short-term, look at bus lines and see where those need to be redone and/or expanded.

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 want to see an analysis of what our workers are already getting, but I do support a higher minimum wage, though I think the real solution is more universal healthcare , improved daycare, and other things. The minimum wage is way too low, but raising it, without addressing the other costs, isn't going to solve a lot for the long-term. We need to provide healthcare for people who work, right now if you take a job, even at minimum wage, you don't qualify for Medicaid, but you can't afford insurance - that problem still exists at \$15/hour. It's the same for daycare. We need to make sure people who want to work can afford to work - that's not just through minimum wage, but also through other programs that can't really be addressed at the local level.

Yes, everyone should be allowed to collectively bargain. Unions were the backbone of the movements that limited work hours, created better safety, and benefits.

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 support all of those, but marriage equality and a right to choose are not local issues that a City Council can address. I would make sure Durham has non-discrimination policies (to the extent allowed by law), and lobby to get laws changed to allow more local control again.