



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

Name: Charlie Reece

Position sought: Durham City Council At-Large

1. 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 am an avid supporter of the People First Policy that would require developers seeking financial incentives from the city of Durham to complete an equitable development scorecard that would help elected officials and the community at large understand exactly what benefits the proposed development would bring to the people of this city. I have spent much of the last year working on the scorecard in partnership with Justine Oller with the North Carolina League of Conservation Voters, Kaji Reyes of PowerUp NC, and Dr. Allan Freyer of the North Carolina Justice Center. I organized meetings with the four of us and all members of the Durham City Council to walk them through the equitable development scorecard and to build support for it on the council.

The People First Policy will require developers to tell us just how their projects would benefit the actual people who live in Durham and not just our city's property tax base. The equitable development scorecard will allow elected officials and community members to understand with full transparency exactly what the city proposes to incentivize with the money being requested by developers. Moreover, the content and structure of the scorecard means that projects will score better if they commit to paying living wages, hire residents who live in the community where the project will be built (especially residents from low-income communities and communities of color), support local businesses (especially women- and minority-owned businesses), and promote affordable housing and prevent displacement. Perhaps most importantly, the scorecard provides a concrete method for holding both developers and elected officials accountable for the decisions they make when granting financial incentives.

What kinds of projects would I agree to incentivize? That's easy -- projects that score well on the equitable development scorecard.

2. 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 enthusiastically support the \$95 million housing bond because it represents an unprecedented opportunity to change the trajectory of the housing market in Durham, and because it is a critical step toward a future in which anyone can afford to live and work and raise their kids in our city, no matter how much money they make or what part of the city they call home.

The \$95 million housing bond will supercharge our city's work on housing access and affordability in order to create and preserve thousands of affordable homes for low-income families. The majority of those affordable homes will be located downtown and in the residential neighborhoods that surround downtown. That means that these homes will be even more affordable because they will be within walking distance of the most robust parts of our city's public transit system. Working to increase creation and preservation of affordable homes near transit is the key to unlocking a future for Durham in which our city is not only income diverse but also racially and ethnically diverse.

But the bond is not just about the creation and preservation of affordable homes. The housing bond also sets aside millions of dollars to help folks stay in their homes, whether they're renters or homeowners, by expanding current support for home repair and rehabilitation as well as property tax relief for low-income homeowners, and by supporting eviction diversion and emergency rental assistance for renters. The bond will also make possible an unprecedented surge in resources for street outreach to our neighbors experiencing homelessness, and to build a new coordinated entry system for homeless individuals and families to get them housed right away.

Voting YES on the \$95 million housing bond is absolutely the right choice for Durham.

3. 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?

The RAD conversion program upon which the Durham Housing Authority is embarking is absolutely critical to the future of our DHA communities. Given that the federal government has consistently refused to provide local housing authorities with the resources necessary to keep up with basic repairs and maintenance of their properties, housing authority communities across the country are crumbling and the national backlog of repairs for these communities is estimated to be well over \$50 billion. And every year, that backlog increases by \$3.4 billion. It's appalling and a national disgrace.

The RAD program is the only way that the federal government makes available to local housing authorities to address this problem, and over the last year DHA has conducted a deep and meaningful

community engagement process with residents in our housing authority communities. DHA Executive Director Anthony Scott has said that DHA's 5 year plan was based on the content of those conversations between DHA management and their residents, and that real resident engagement will continue to be a critical part of the planning and implementation process throughout the course of the plan. If the residents of our DHA communities feel that they are being shut out of the process at any point along the way, I will personally intervene to make sure that the perspective of those residents continues to be centered in this important work.

4. 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.

The rules that govern RAD conversions contain strong tenant protections: an absolute right of tenants to return to the converted properties if they had to be temporarily relocated during construction without any rescreening or additional income verification; retention of the rights of tenants to organize themselves into residents councils (or the like) funded by DHA; all fair housing, accessibility and reasonable accommodation requirements; and many more. But those ironclad protections are only as strong as the local housing authority's enforcement of them, and in a handful of communities across the country, there have been some appalling cases of failure to enforce the guarantees enshrined in the RAD conversion rules.

Here in Durham, DHA Executive Director Anthony Scott and Mayor Steve Schewel have both been clear that any residents who must be relocated from their DHA community due to construction related to these RAD conversions will have an absolute right to return to their rebuilt community with the full protections afforded to tenants under federal regulations. Moreover, the construction plan for the RAD conversions in DHA's 5-year plan will make maximum use of existing land at these DHA communities to build in place without the need to relocate residents to other DHA communities. For example, where a new residential building can be built on existing land, residents in existing residences can be moved into brand new homes in the same DHA community while their previous building is redeveloped. DHA has promised to take this approach in every conceivable instance during these RAD conversions, which means that this process will likely have many fewer relocations than other RAD conversions around the country.

Bottom line: DHA has promised to honor their commitments to our neighbors who are tenants in our DHA communities. I will be vigilant in holding them to their promises.

5. 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?

When city staff recommended the elimination of the Longtime Homeowner Grant Program, was immediately, vocally and vehemently opposed. During the public meeting when this recommendation was first made, I said that I would never support the elimination of the program and that I would not vote for this year's city budget if it did not include funding for this program. Ultimately, funding was restored for the current year.

Having said that, there are significant problems with the program, and I truly appreciate the dilemma faced by staff in reviewing its effectiveness. The grant program was hobbled from the very beginning by the geographic limits imposed on the program. I have opposed these limits from the outset, arguing that the city should be more aggressive in providing this sort of tax relief for longtime low-income homeowners due to the city's aggressive pursuit of public-private partnerships downtown for the last 15 years. Those partnerships certainly revitalized downtown Durham but they also superheated the residential real estate market downtown and in the residential neighborhoods that surround downtown. This grant program should at least have covered downtown and all of those neighborhoods.

The program has also been hampered by the county's unwillingness to join the city in providing these grants to longtime low-income homeowners. Because county taxes make up about 60% of a property owner's tax bill, the city's participation alone doesn't amount to a lot of money in most cases. The county's participation is crucial to the future viability of this program.

I still believe in the Longtime Homeowner Grant Program. My hope is that the coming year will find the county more amenable to considering partnering with the city to provide property tax relief for longtime low-income homeowners here in Durham.

6. 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 definitely voted in Participatory Budgeting! I voted for the following projects: LGBTQ Youth Center; Technology for DPS; Bus Shelters with Reclaimed Art and Solar Panels; El Futuro; Pedestrian Crossing at the Intersection of James and Nation Streets. I believed that this combination of projects was a great representation of the various kinds of great improvements that could be funded through Participatory Budgeting. I'm especially excited about the fact that the LGBTQ Youth Center and the bus shelters were funded, both of which will address a significant need in our community. I'm disappointed that the pedestrian improvements at James and Nation Streets were not funded, but I hope that the city will be able to take other steps to make that intersection safer for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers alike. The proximity of that intersection to TROSA means that lots of their residents travel through that intersection on foot to catch the bus, so we need to improve safety there despite the fact that the project was not funded.

7. 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 definitely support doing Participatory Budgeting again in Durham in the spring of 2021 (the next scheduled cycle). The program exceeded expectations in terms of community engagement and votes cast, and the process of community input and staff vetting followed by steering committee approval for projects to appear on the ballot is essentially sound (but see below). I believe that a \$2.4 million allocation should be sufficient in the next budget for this program, especially considering that the approved projects during this cycle only totaled up to about \$2.2 million.

The next year will be critical for Participatory Budgeting in Durham, as city staff work to begin implementation of at least half of the approved projects during the next year. We will also engage in a thorough “lessons learned” process to understand what worked well, what didn’t, and how we can make Participatory Budgeting even better next time. Two issues stand out for me for close scrutiny. First, we should take a hard look at whether the ward system is the right way to award these projects. When this program was first being considered, we thought about other ways we could allocate projects in Participatory Budgeting, but in the end we decided to stick with the ward system because it’s what we had and it’s what people know. We should look at the possibility of doing things differently next time around. Second, we should add more clarity and more transparency during the staff vetting portion of project review. There was at least one instance when staff legal review bounced a potentially promising project off of the final ballot that was approved by the steering committee, and we should take additional steps to ensure that that sort of vetting process is as transparent and as well-explained as possible.

But that’s what the next year is for! We’re going to learn from this first successful year, and the next cycle of Participatory Budgeting is going to be even better.

8. 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?

Last year, the city council asked city staff to develop a plan for engaging with communities adjacent to proposed green infrastructure projects. The idea was to find a way for the city to get these communities involved in all aspects of the planning and design of these projects from the very beginning so that the people who would find their neighborhoods most directly impacted by a park or a greenway trail could have the loudest voice in the choices about that park or trail.

In response, our staff developed the Durham Equitable Community Engagement Blueprint. This plan seeks to meet neighborhood residents where they are in their own communities, and places the burden on the city to invest the resources necessary to ensure that unrepresented demographics are brought into the process. This type of equitable engagement centers the racial dynamics and history of the specific neighborhoods in question. Equitable engagement is not satisfied with sending mail or posting to a neighborhood listserv; rather, city staff must partner with local community organizations and hire people who actually live in affected communities to educate and engage their neighbors about these potential

projects. Door to door canvassing must supplement tabling at the local convenience store as a way to reach residents who are homebound, and the engagement must be long-term and place-based and not merely transactional in order to avoid engagement fatigue.

This kind of equitable engagement has the potential to turn the planning process on its head, and to empower neighborhoods to mold and shape green infrastructure projects to meet their community's needs rather than the needs of folks who simply want a way to get through their neighborhoods. And with the investments the city of Durham stands ready to make in this process, that kind of empowerment is within our grasp.

9. 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 the 18 new police officers requested by Chief Davis from the city budget, and I voted to allocate funds to bring part-time city employees under the city's living wage ordinance which now sets a minimum hourly wage for all city employees of \$15.46 (indexed to inflation). I stand by these votes as the right priorities for Durham.

There are lots of data that demonstrate that hiring 18 new police officers in Durham is not warranted. The number of priority 1 calls for service (911 calls of the most serious variety) are down compared to last year, and it took less time on average for officers to respond to those calls for service than it did last year. And clearance rates for most crimes were also up from last year and beating national benchmarks.

But beyond the data, the simple fact is this: Durham (like every other community in our country) invests too much money in policing and not enough money in affordable housing, job training, health care, public schools, and living wages. When the data we use to show how our law enforcement officers are responding to the challenge of crime in our community shows definitively that we are meeting that challenge, hiring 18 more police officers makes little sense. Better instead to tackle some of the other pressing problems in our community that we're not handling so well, like increasing eviction diversion efforts and paying part-time city workers a living wage.

So I voted to bring our part-time employees under the city's living wage ordinance. Now all city employees will make at least \$15.46 per hour.

10. 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 strongly support the creation of such a task force. My colleagues Jillian Johnson, Javiera Caballero and I are reaching back out to Durham Beyond Policing to set up some preliminary meetings to talk about what that task force might look like, its mandate, and the timetable for its work. The three of us have developed a joint policy platform called the Bull City Together Platform (www.charliefordurham.com/platform), and in that platform we take the position that the city of Durham should “[p]artner with members of the Durham community to develop and fund additional strategies to promote harm reduction and community safety separate and apart from law enforcement.” The task force proposed by Durham Beyond Policing is exactly what we’re describing in our platform, and we’re eager to begin that work. Because no one knows what it will take to make communities safe and reduce harm better than the people who live in those communities. Empowering them to improve safety in their own neighborhoods makes all the sense in the world.

11. 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?

Duke University and North Carolina Railroad killed the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project. In its wake, Durham must work together with our regional partners to develop alternatives to light rail that reduce traffic congestion, meet our region’s growing transportation demands, combat sprawl, and address the critical environmental crisis of global climate change. That’s a tall order, but I know we’re up to the challenge.

We need a safer, more equitable and more environmentally friendly way to think about transportation in Durham, by mapping out a future which prioritizes public transit by keeping bus fares low while expanding service, reducing wait times and building more bus shelters; by promoting traffic calming measures to reduce the dangers posed to cyclists and pedestrians by cars and trucks; and by investing in more sidewalks and protected bike lanes and greenway trails to make walking and cycling truly viable commuting options for more and more Durham residents.

From a regional perspective, the alternatives to light rail look both east and west. To the east, along the I-40 corridor we must move forward with commuter rail between Wake and Durham Counties; to the west, along the NC 54/US 15-501 corridor, we must move quickly to develop bus rapid transit between Orange and Durham Counties, perhaps along a dedicated route that uses the alignment already acquired for light rail.

These ideas will be more fully developed in the revised Durham County Transit Plan, which is currently underway. I will continue to be a forceful advocate for expanding both local and regional transit as well as cycling and pedestrian infrastructure.

12. 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?

If I am ever permitted to do so by state law, I would cast an enthusiastic vote to make Durham's living wage ordinance the law governing all employment within the city of Durham (currently the ordinance only applies to city employees). Bringing hourly pay up to a living wage is possibly the single most powerful step we could take to lift thousands of Durham families out of poverty and bring affordable homes within the reach of so many of our residents. Our living wage ordinance sets a living wage at \$15.46 per hour, and the ordinance ties the hourly rate to inflation so that it increases each year with the cost of living. That's how our state and federal minimum wages should work, but instead it's been ten years since the federal minimum wage was increased to a shamefully low \$7.25 per hour.

In April of 2018, the Durham City Council passed a unanimous resolution calling for the repeal of North Carolina General Statute 95-98 that bans collective bargaining with public sector unions. In April of this year, I traveled to Raleigh to stand with one of Durham's state legislators, Zack Hawkins, at a press conference at the General Assembly in support of his bill to repeal the ban on public sector collective bargaining. It's not right that our city employees cannot come together and collectively bargain for better pay, better working conditions and better benefits.

13. 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 have been a lifelong supporter of LGBTQ+ rights, marriage equality and abortion rights. I was privileged to serve as a board member of our local Planned Parenthood affiliate for over three years, and four years ago I was honored to earn the endorsement of the Equality NC Action Fund during my first campaign for city council. During my time on the council, I was proud to author and introduce the city council's resolution opposing HB2 and demanding that it be repealed immediately. I also voted for our city council resolution calling for the repeal of the Hyde Amendment, which bars the use of federal funds for abortion care.

If and when local governments in North Carolina are legally permitted to do so, I will author and introduce a non-discrimination ordinance within the city of Durham to protect Durham residents from discrimination in places of public accommodations on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

I will continue to support our city's efforts to make sure all people are welcome in the city of Durham. Being open to all kinds of people is in Durham's DNA, and Durham's city government does everything we can to live that every day.