



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

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**Name:** Steve Schewel

**Position sought:** Durham City Mayor

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**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 support the establishment of an Equitable Development Scorecard, and the one attached is excellent in many ways. I adhere to all of the principles enunciated, and I think they are the right ones to put forward in such a scorecard and in discussions with developers. I've very much appreciated the discussions I have been in with Durham For All folks and others around this scorecard. My overriding concern is a practical one which needs to be worked out: How do we match the on-the-ground timing of incentive negotiations with the work that needs to be done to satisfy the criteria for the scorecard? We give very few incentives nowadays, but very occasionally, the State of North Carolina may come to us with an incentive request for which a decision needs to be prompt, and I think the practicalities of that need to be considered. In addition, there are times when I can imagine an incentive deal being off the charts (in a good way) on one or more of the criteria, but not satisfying all of the others. For example, suppose we have a developer who is doing great --exceeding! -- on the employment and wage categories but not well on the local leases. I think there needs to be room for this sort of thing within the scorecard. In short, I think the scorecard is a great idea and that the one People First has developed is really good in many ways; but I do think there are practical considerations that still need to be figured out if it's going to work. Discussions with our OEWD staff would be very helpful on the practicalities.

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**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, the housing bond is my first priority, and it should be our entire community's first political priority over the next three months of the bond campaign. The \$95 million bond is a crucial element of the total \$157 million five-year affordable housing plan that the council has adopted. We know what our future will be if the bond fails because we are watching that future develop now. It will be a future where our central city neighborhoods are the province of rich white people and where people of color, many of whom have lived in these neighborhoods for their entire lives, are forced farther and farther out of town. Or we can choose an alternative future for Durham, one worthy of our city, in which we pass the bond and intervene in a bold way against the market forces to make our city diverse and affordable to everyone. If we pass the bond, over five years we can build 1,800 new affordable units, preserve 800 affordable units, create 200 home ownership opportunities for first-time low-income homebuyers, house 1,700 homeless people, and keep more than 2,000 low-income families in their homes. We will not only build and preserve this housing, but we will do much of it downtown near jobs, transit and amenities. We will deconcentrate poverty, creating mixed income communities on 30 acres of Durham Housing Authority property and guaranteeing the absolute right of return to all DHA residents living in the 387 crumbling DHA units that we will replace. The housing plan includes \$2.5 million for training DHA residents to take and keep the good jobs building the affordable housing, and DHA has a developer (owned by a woman of color) with an outstanding record of minority business participation.

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**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?**

It is imperative and non-negotiable that there be a City Council-appointed accountability and advisory committee that works closely with DHA and the City's staff during the entire five-year implementation period for the housing bond. This committee must and will include DHA residents as well as other community members. Among other tasks, this committee will monitor the process by which DHA residents whose units are knocked down are rehoused. Most of them will be immediately rehoused in new housing on-site, but this needs to be closely monitored so the promise of return is kept. There is understandable mistrust on this point because of our national and local history of displacement of black and poor residents, so we must guard against that vigorously during this process.

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**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.**

Please see the answer above for my response concerning the guarantee of the right of return and how we will protect it. To flesh out the actual practical detail of how this will happen on the ground, let me start by saying that each DHA property in this five-year redevelopment will have its own plan. At JJ Henderson,

for example, the renovation will take place on a floor-by-floor basis, so there should be little if any displacement of residents from the building (while a new 82-unit affordable housing building will be built next door). At Forest Hills Heights, for example, where there is a lot of vacant land, the plan would be to construct a new building before knocking down the old ones, thus offering new housing on-site immediately to those who live there now. In other words, the practical plans for these sites will comport with the legal and ethical need to guarantee the right of return.

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**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 understand the Community Development Department’s recommendation because, after two years, the current tax relief program for low-income homeowners is not working well. However, I and my council colleagues decided to keep the program going for another year while we craft a city-wide tax relief policy that will work. The current program suffers from various ills. It is only in three neighborhoods. It has had very limited uptake by homeowners because the amount of the tax relief is small and there is a little bit of bureaucratic action necessary to receive it. But we can fix this and create a really good program if, and only if, we can get the active participation Durham County. Durham County taxes are 60% of property taxes, and they run the tax collection system, so without their cooperation we will not be able to succeed. We need to make the tax-relief system for long-term low-income homeowners citywide. We need to have the County fully join this system so the tax relief will be much more substantial. We need to have a system that is easy for staff and recipients alike that would have the taxpayer come to the County tax office to pay, have their income and long-term homeownership certified, and then at that same time the grant for tax relief to the homeowner would kick in. This tax relief is critically important to help keep low-income homeowners in their homes. It is also substantially redistributive, which is an important attribute.

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**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?**

Yes, I voted in the PB balloting. I don’t recall all of the projects I voted for, but they included the picnic-table wi-fi at DHA properties and several sidewalk projects.

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**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 strongly support running PB again. I will admit, as I have often, that it exceeded my highest expectations for its success. I was a doubter, supporting the enactment of PB because I wanted to support Mayor Pro Tem Johnson on something of great importance to her. But I did not believe that it would get the very high participation that it did. The process was fabulous with the budget delegates and City staff doing a terrific job. I really felt that I was watching grassroots democracy as it is supposed to work. I also watched voters all over town casting their ballots, and I saw an infectious enthusiasm for PB. We made a great strategic decision that I think set our PB apart from almost any place else: We turned the implementation of PB over to our incredibly capable City staff rather than to a consultant at the recommendation of our city manager. And with the help of groups like Durham For All, we had an all-out publicity and organizing blitz which was key to our success as well. I'm waiting for the implementation of the PB projects and our formal evaluation before I recommend changes. But I would not change the basic elements that made our PB the most successful PB in the nation (!!). As for the next round of PB funding, I thought this year's \$2.4 million turned out to be a great number. But I am open to raising the amount if a good case can be made.

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**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?**

One mark of our City Council over the past two years since I became mayor has been the great expansion of opportunities for our residents to serve on City boards and commission. During this time, we created the Women's Council, the Racial Equity Task Force, the Bicentennial Honors Commission, and the Workers Rights Commission, and we enlarged the Environmental Affairs Board. In addition, we overhauled the Mayor's Hispanic/Latino Committee so that it is now much more broadly representative of the Latinx community. We have to pace this work so that we get these groups up and running well, but we will continue to add representative groups as they are needed. We have also adopted the Equitable Engagement framework which calls for grassroots community engagement, including paying community advocates and ambassadors, for use with green infrastructure projects like our trails, with the new Comprehensive Plan update, and many more future projects. We have also budgeted significantly for this, and added staff for it, in our current budget. All of this represents significant power-sharing. I am open to all ideas from others about how we can do more power-sharing in the coming years.

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**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?**

During the budget deliberations, I made clear that my first priority for additional spending within the budget guidelines that council set for ourselves was raising the pay of our part-time and seasonal employees to the City minimum of \$15.48 per hour, and I voted accordingly. However, I also proposed a compromise that would have added nine new patrol officers to our force and still kept us within our budget

guidelines. Although I respect the council majority's reasoning, and the work of Durham Beyond Policing, I felt it was important to support Chief Davis in this regard. Chief Davis has brought us tremendous, effective reform in our police department, and she is among the most progressive police chiefs in the nation. She brought us real enforcement of the council's written-consent-to-search policy. Our traffic stops are down by two-thirds (which is an incredible number). Our searches of cars are down by two-thirds. Our drug arrests are down by 50 percent. Chief Davis has made small misdemeanors, especially drug possession, mandatorily referred to our Misdemeanor Diversion Court pre-arrest and pre-citation, so that the person in question does not get any criminal record. She has appointed representatives to marginalized communities. The LGBTQ police liaison has established safe spaces in businesses all over town for LGBTQ people to go in case of an emergency. She has expanded the U-Visa program which has opened the way to visas for many undocumented Durham residents. I could go on and on. These are effective, important reforms. So when this chief asked us for more officers and made a strong case against overtime policing, I felt it important to support her. I think the council majority made a mistake in not supporting the chief in this regard.

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**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 definitely support serious study of non-policing responses to violence to see what is working around the nation. I do believe we need first responses to some 911 calls that are from social workers or mental health counselors rather than police officers, and I believe a triage system could be built within our 911 system to support that. I believe in the “violence interrupter” model of Bull City United, and I think we can and must do much more in this regard. I appreciated the strong case for this made by Durham Beyond Policing, and I support it totally. We do need a community task force to help lead this work. I am not yet sure if it ought to be a new task force or if the work could best be done by our Human Relations Commission. I don't want to undercut the work and purview of our existing boards and commissions, so I am sensitive to that here. We need to give that some more thought. On the question of pay, we are now beginning to rethink whether we ought to be paying members of our volunteer boards and commissions. This is a difficult question to which the council will devote significant study. Whatever we do in terms of paying, or not, members of all of our boards and commissions, we should do the same for any group studying community-based wellness and safety.

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**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 gave my heart and soul to the light rail, fighting for it until the bitter end. By losing the light rail, we lost \$1.25 billion in federal funding. And now we are back at the beginning of planning for a regional transit system. We must make a beautiful Phoenix rise from the ashes of the light rail. Locally, we must continue to improve our bus system. During this past year, we made the bus system free for any person up to 18, as well as continuing to have it free for seniors. The average fare per ride on our system is now about 30

cents, which is remarkably low. We serve about 20,000 riders per day, and our per hour ridership is the highest of any large city in North Carolina. We must continue to add routes, reduce headways, and build bus shelters at a more rapid rate. We now have 1,100 bus stops and only 200 shelters, and we must change that. At the same time, we must figure out the way forward on regional transit. We have to connect effectively with our region, and we must do so in a way that, like the old light rail plan, would especially help low-income people connect to jobs. We are putting a structure in place to begin making decisions with our partners in Orange and Wake Counties about the commuter rail to Raleigh, already part of our transit plan, and about bus rapid transit or potentially some light rail as well. We must make these decisions in the context of our Comprehensive Plan update because of the close connection between transit and land use. We should not rush this process, but we should move expeditiously to create a new regional plan.

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**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 deplore our current situation vis-à-vis the legislature on this and so many other issues. If Durham could set our own local minimum wage, I would set it at the City minimum of \$15.48 per hours, indexed to go up as the City's livable wage calculation rises. Yes, I support public employees' right to unionize and to bargain collectively, and I have supported this vocally for many years.

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**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 championed the cause of LGBTQ+ equality for many, many years, including marriage equality. In the mid-1980's, I wrote and published in the Independent, along with a large photo of the happy couple, what was the first wedding notice for an LGBTQ+ (in this case lesbian) couple in our state. (Of course, this was a marriage of the heart only, since marriage equality was still years away.) And I similarly am an ardent supporter of abortion rights. I often use the mayor's bully pulpit to trumpet Durham's embrace of our most vulnerable and marginalized residents, including especially LGBTQ+ youth and transgender people. I have worked with our police leadership to make sure our officers understand and work well to help transgender and gender fluid people they encounter. In the next year, we must ready ourselves for the sunset of HB 142 such that we are ready with non-discrimination ordinances formerly prohibited by HB2. One of the ways in which Durham government can best advance the interests of women is to make sure that women-owned businesses get significant contracting opportunities with the City, and we do that. We must continue to improve those numbers. We must also make sure that within City government itself women are paid commensurately with men and that they are hired in significant numbers in positions of authority. We do that well within Durham City government. In the next year, I

would like our Women's Council, a new board, to take on an analysis of the status of women in Durham in a variety of areas so that we can see where we need to take action.