



Questionnaire for Mayor and City Council Candidates 2021

Candidate Name: Javiera Caballero

Date: 8/15/2021

Position Sought: Mayor

What is your ideal vision for Durham? How will your leadership in elected office get us there?

My vision for Durham is a city where all residents can thrive -- where everyone can lead dignified lives with good paying jobs, good schools, a clear plan for how we will combat climate change, and where we recognize that public safety starts with investing in our communities and our people. I want to live in a city where I know my kids and other young people will be able to afford to stay if they choose to.

As mayor I will continue the work we've already begun and which I am helping to lead as a council member. I have fought for this vision as a member of city council and will continue to do so as mayor -- from our historic commitment to affordable housing to establishing our PATH BREAKING new community safety department. We continue to expand and improve how residents advocate and share their ideas with Durham city government. We have many challenges before us, but we also have so many opportunities for city government to work for everyone. I grew up in Ronald Reagan's 80's, with a vision stamped into our culture that the government was the enemy -- but I believe that in a democracy, the people are the government. I believe if any city in the US can rise to a vision of a more just and equitable place, acknowledge the harm caused by oppressive systems, and still believe in a radically transformed world, it's Durham.

How does my leadership get us there? I believe in collaborative consensus-building governance. I believe leadership that incorporates many voices and ideas makes the end result stronger because more folks feel committed to the vision and ideas being implemented. I also know that the policies I want to continue putting forward are rooted in my values. I believe in our collective power to dream and build a better community. We must always look to the past and acknowledge the many ways we have failed and do the important work of transformation.

What do you think is the biggest challenge Durham is currently facing and how would you address it?

Right now and throughout the fall and winter of 2022 our most urgent challenge is the Covid pandemic. We have to get our vaccination rate higher. I am extremely worried about our community especially with the full opening of schools in less than a week. I am proud that the City and County of Durham have together allocated \$1.3 million for a Vaccine Equity program, which has allowed us to add 45 additional community health workers. In the next few weeks there will be walk up vaccine events all over Durham. I support allocating more funds if needed toward our vaccine equity plan. We are also very fortunate that we will receive \$51 million in federal funding from the American Rescue Plan, and we will be putting \$25 million of this money into the community over the next several months.

Setting Covid aside, Durham faces urgent challenges in affordable housing, gun violence, and the looming climate crisis. These are challenges that we must tackle simultaneously. The budget council passed in June 2021 was the best budget we have passed since I've been on the city council, and we must continue pursuing and implementing a bold vision that our current council has laid out. We have a lot of work ahead of us, but the city has made important commitments in recent years that give me hope that we are on the right track. A few of our recent priorities include:

- We fully funded the affordable housing bond overwhelmingly approved by voters in 2019. It is the largest affordable housing effort ever mounted in NC.
- We increased our Capital Improvement Plan spending in order to add \$6 million annually for green infrastructure projects in neighborhoods that have historically experienced disinvestment.
- We created a community safety department that is completely independent of the police department and will help Durham soon lead the nation in the appropriate response to 911 calls. Our greatly expanded violence interrupter program will be housed in this department as well as staff to build out Durham's non-police response to mental health emergencies and other calls where a police officer is not the most effective responder
- During Covid we supported 250 businesses, most of them Black-owned and women-owned, with grants and loans.
- We have updated our process for awarding contracts and developed a better strategy on how to engage firms that are minority or women owned.
- Durham has 20,000 bus boardings per day, and because of the council's recent action it will be fare free until June 2022. In addition, we have added new routes and shortened wait times during the past four years. We must continue to expand this crucial service.
- The updated comprehensive plan is moving forward, and the department is incorporating the goals and objectives that were drafted with unprecedented community engagement and feedback.
- The city has committed to move city operations to a supply of 80% renewable energy by 2030, achieve carbon neutrality in City operations by 2040, and reach 100% renewable

energy sourcing by 2050, and significant solarization of city operations is already underway.

- We have an updated franchise agreement with Duke Energy that helps the city create its own renewable energy and we have applied with the county to The Green Source Advantage program -- this will allow Durham's government to power itself mostly through renewable energy sources.

I believe we are addressing our challenges. We need to continue the momentum of the work we've done, implement it effectively, and improve upon it as we learn and improve.

There has been a nation-wide push to extend the federal eviction moratorium that was due to end last month. More than 11 million people across the US were at risk of being evicted from their homes if the moratorium had not been extended until October 2021. Many residents in Durham will still be in jeopardy of being evicted in October 2021 if the moratorium is not extended again. What protections will you push for to ensure that residents are able to stay in their homes, despite state preemption laws? What would you do to support those who are in need of financial assistance?

For the past several years the city council, I believe 2018 was the first year, has funded eviction diversion through our contract with Legal Aid. We now provide \$500,000 annually to help make sure tenants have legal representation, which has helped hundreds of residents stay in their homes.

We are also incredibly fortunate that Durham will be receiving more than \$33 million in rental assistance, between the city and the county from the federal government. These funds are already being distributed through Durham Social Services. This will help thousands of Durham residents stay in their homes. We still need to be aware of a potential need for additional funding but between these funds and our Legal Aid funding will go a long way toward keeping people in their homes.

Durham has been identified as the city with the second-biggest rent increase across the country, with a 46.8 percent jump year-over-year. (*data based on two-bedroom apartments across the U.S. - Triangle Business Journal*) What are your plans to ensure affordable housing for ALL residents moving forward? In addition to more affordable housing what are the measures you think need to happen to ensure affordability in Durham regarding renters?

We successfully (with 76% approval rate) passed an incredible affordable housing bond in the fall of 2019. Funding from that bond will allow us to:

- build 1,600 new affordable housing units
- preserve 800 affordable rental units
- move 1,700 unhoused individuals and households into permanent housing
- provide 400 first time home buyers with affordable home ownership opportunities

- provide 3,000 low-income renters and homeowners the opportunity to remain in their homes or improve them as rising property values threaten to further gentrify our communities.

All together, the city's five-year affordable housing program, already well underway, will support permanently affordable housing for 15,000 people -- more than 5% of all Durham residents -- as well as attacking our homelessness problem.

We have also increased the money we give to Legal Aid to help with eviction diversions. Additionally, the city has been able to distribute \$10 million of rental assistance because of federal government stimulus packages passed due to the Covid pandemic. This doesn't include what Durham County has received, and both the city and county are expected to receive more -- the city will receive another \$8 million. Unfortunately, this is not enough, and we need to do more. We must continue to build affordable units, but more importantly we need to work to keep the already available affordable units -- affordable. These are "naturally occurring" affordable units, meaning they are not subsidized with public money. Currently we have a lot of out-of-town investors, many of them part of large international investment firms, purchasing many of our older apartment complexes, minimally improving them, and then raising the rent with little notice. NC is a particularly hostile state towards renters, and the tools we have available at the local level are limited. I know there is a group of residents including Bull City Tenants United who are sharing their plan with city council members. I look forward to hearing more from them and working to see what is possible to incorporate to help Durham renters more.

Another area that affects housing affordability are our land use policies. We must move towards more flexible zoning, which needs to include by-right development for triplexes and quads. We made an important first step with the passage of expanded housing choices -- EHC -- in the fall of 2019, which encourages the construction of accessory dwelling units and the ability to build on small lots, but we need to do more. Portland, Oregon recently passed impressive land use policy changes, and as Mayor I will work to identify leading examples around the nation that could work in Durham.

The historically Black communities of Braggtown, Merrick Moore, and Walltown are being threatened by displacement due to private investment and development. What resources and support can the City deploy to help longtime residents resist the negative impact of these developments? (Question submitted by Walltown Community Association)

I believe one of the best resources we can provide to the residents in these neighborhoods and other city neighborhoods is to pass a joint city/county property tax grant program for long-term, low-income homeowners who are below 60% Average Median Income (AMI). The county has approved a program targeting households below 30% AMI, and I'd like to expand that program to support more of our residents. The city has committed \$500,000 to cover its share plus the administrative costs.

The city currently has a program administered through the Community Development department for residents below 80% AMI below but it's only for 3 neighborhoods: Southside, Northeast Central Durham, and Southwest Durham. The city program is slated to end and if it does there will be a gap for residents between when the county program begins. We are taking up this issue at the council work session on 8/15.

Another resource or tool we have are development agreements, which are essentially voluntary agreements between the city and developers in which developers agree to go beyond the unified development ordinance (UDO) requirement to require community benefits like affordable housing and green space. The Bragtown community (my understanding is the community prefers using one g vs. two to disassociate itself from the Confederate general it was named for) is working to persuade developers to enter into a development agreement because the developers were going to need some zoning accommodations from the city for their proposed development. This unfortunately is not the case with the large redevelopment project slated to happen at Northgate Mall by Northwood Ravin, although city council members and staff continue to press for this agreement to support Walltown and other surrounding neighborhoods. So far, the developers have intentionally made sure phase 1 of the project can be done completely by-right and it is not until phase 2 where they will need some zoning accommodations from the city, which is many years in the future.

The majority of City Council's power lies in zoning. What are your ideas around equitable zoning? How will you implement them?

I do not believe you can have equitable zoning in our current system that is driven by and based on a for profit model and where there is no belief in housing as a human right. What we are doing to at least improve the process is bringing the community into the zoning process earlier, being more transparent, and expecting developers to engage with community members in more robust ways. The city's planning department has begun using social pinpoint <https://durham.mysocialpinpoint.com/land-use/map#/>, which allows residents to see and interact with zoning cases in a much better way. The Planning Department is also taking the information, insight, and guidance they are hearing from residents and incorporating it into our updated comprehensive plan where possible.

Durham For All and Durham Beyond Policing collaborated on our 10 to Transform campaign earlier this year. Our demand to City Council was to transfer 60 vacant officer positions in the Durham Police Department (DPD) to a new Department of Community Safety and Wellness (DCSW) and hire unarmed professionals to respond to traffic and mental health crisis calls. The City Council reallocated 5 positions from DPD to the DCSW and froze 15 more in DPD, with an affirmative vote needed in January to reallocate them to DCSW. Do you commit to fulfilling our 10 to Transform demand and vote to reallocate those 15 frozen positions to the DCSW in January 2022? Would you vote to reallocate 20 more vacancies each year for the next two years? Why or why not?

Yes. As a member of City Council I have committed to move those 15 frozen positions to the Community Safety department, and I will uphold that commitment as Mayor. And as long as the department has a clear path and has actionable goals, I support the movement of additional positions from the police department to the Community Safety Department. That said, I want to be methodical and intentional about how we do that work. I think the creation of the Community Safety Department was a significant and important first step, but it's just the beginning of how we can reimagine what public safety can be.

During our 10 to Transform campaign, there were deep conversations with our community and elected officials about what safety looks like for our community. The uptick in gun violence was a consistent thread in many of these conversations, with many different views around how we address the gun violence in our city. What are your strategies to address the gun violence in Durham? How would you ensure that Durham has safe communities?

The gun violence we see tearing through so many neighborhoods leaves families and communities traumatized. We need solid policing to help solve those crimes but more importantly we need to have expanded programs and a better response to preventing the violence. We are doing some of that work now. The city council voted to allocate \$1 million to put four new teams of Bull City United violence interrupters into four neighborhoods experiencing high levels of gun violence. We allocated \$250,000 to fund grassroots groups working with our young people. We funded summer Youthworks internships for 400 high school students, by far the largest number ever. And I support the continued expansion of our summer Youthworks program and Durham Parks & Rec programming. I also support better collaboration with both the county and our schools, especially Durham Public Schools, to ensure we are serving some of our youngest residents the best way possible.

Finally, when a young person messes up we need to have a strong process to bring them back into the fold. I do not believe we can give up on them even when they have caused harm. I am very proud of the city-led misdemeanor diversion program, which keeps hundreds of people out of the justice system and its cascading consequences and diverts them into community service and education instead.

I also think we move towards safer communities by dealing with root causes to societal problems, passing comprehensive gun reform, and building out alternatives to police so that the appropriate response can be deployed. Many of our issues are due to poverty and solving them will take a long time and involve all branches and levels of government. For most of our nation's history, the knee jerk reaction to crime and violence has been to throw more money into policing. We can trace that approach back through the policies of Trump, Reagan, and Nixon -- each of whom used a 'tough on crime' approach as code for racist policies to rally their base of supporters. We have many decades of data that shows us this approach does not work -- at least not if our goal is to increase safety by preventing harm rather than simply punishing people once harm has already occurred.

While we can work to solve some of the root causes to violence, in all its forms, at the local level (and we're definitely doing this!) we are limited. State and federal laws limit us, especially with comprehensive gun reform and because we lack the financial resources to do all that we might wish to do at the municipal level. What we can do at the local level and what we are doing, with the city as an active partner along with the county and our schools, is ensure we have the appropriate response and continue to expand and improve how we engage our youth.

In March 2020, bus fares were suspended on public buses in Durham, Raleigh, and Cary. This freeze on fares has now been extended until June 2022. What's your plan for continued affordable transit in our city?

The county's updated transit plan is still in development. While the city runs GoDurham, the transit tax is collected by the county. Additionally, the city does not have a direct say as to the decisions made around transit the way the county does. We have GoTriangle representation because we have two seats on the board. We also have seats on the Metropolitan Planning Organization. (Currently I serve as the council's alternate to the MPO.) I will continue to champion affordable transit. Right now, there seems to be the idea that we can either have a great regional transit system, with reliable commuter rail or we can have a really great local bus system, but we can't have both. I think this is wrong and we must have both. We know the folks who use our bus system are our lowest earner households; most do not own a vehicle -- they use our bus system because it's their primary mode of transportation and they need good affordable transit to get to work. In addition, having a regional transit system that connects communities across the Triangle is essential if we're going to take climate change seriously. And current data on the proposed commuter rail shows that a huge proportion of Durham's affordable housing, current and future, is in the rail corridor. These people need access to good jobs throughout the Triangle. As for the continuance of fare free buses after June 2022, we need to keep them fare free.

Due to increasing cases of Covid-19 and the spread of the different variants, there is a possibility of another shutdown. Many people faced financial hardships during the last shutdown. How would you support workers if there is another shutdown? What measures do you think the City should take in responding to the ongoing emergence of Covid-19 variants?

I spoke to this some in my response to question 2. Along with a robust vaccine equity plan we (the city and county) have already mandated an indoor mask policy for all public places. City council has moved back to virtual meetings, and we are also keeping all of our boards and commission meetings virtual for the foreseeable future. We can quickly pivot back to limited city hall hours and move city workers back to our previous work policies if needed. I'm also in support of mandating the Covid vaccine for city employees.

As for supporting other workers and residents, we have more rental assistance funding and other American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds that we will be able to utilize to help our community.

Council will be receiving proposals very soon that community members and organizations submitted during the summer of 2021 on how to spend ARP money.

City and County leadership and key staff are monitoring the situation carefully and can place more restrictions if needed. Some of this also depends on the Governor's state of emergency orders.

Participatory Budgeting 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?

We have done many things besides PB to increase the ability for community members to help make decisions. We have initiated an Equitable Engagement Blueprint for Durham which is used across the City for capital projects, and it is serving as a national model. We have a community engagement team within Neighborhood Improvement Services who has worked closely with many city departments. The planning department continues to run a very dynamic and resident involved updated comprehensive plan update. Recently the goals and objectives of the comp plan were finalized, and the language provided by residents was added to our zoning public hearing agenda items.

I think there's still a lot of work we can do to improve engagement in our budget process. We used to have coffees with council and in 2018 we held our first round of community conversations that included both Durham County and DPS. In 2019 due to the very time intensive nature of Participatory Budgeting, the comprehensive and transit plan updates (initially the planning department was going to lead both) we did not have community conversations. The plan was to then have community conversations on the off cycles of Participatory Budgeting, and we were poised to have them in spring 2020 but then the pandemic hit. I support bringing back community conversations and having them in the fall so that residents can really get into the city's budget process early into the process.

Not all people who give birth or become pregnant are women. Do you support birthing people's right to choose? Why or why not?

Yes, now and always.

Our local elected bodies need to share a collective vision and work together for education for all Durham students. Do you believe Durham needs more charter schools? Why or Why not?

I do not believe we need more charter schools. I believe charter schools create harm because they do not improve educational outcomes for students, and they are resegregating our schools. North Carolina needs to uphold the decision laid out in the Leandro case. We are duty bound by our state constitution to provide a sound basic education.

Holding elected office requires one to make hard choices. If elected, who (please be specific) will you turn to for insight and support in counseling you in tough times?

I am fortunate that I have good, strong working relationships with my colleagues on council, and many city staff. I have had tough conversations to get more deeply into an issue and that helps me arrive at my decision.

In addition to that, I participated in a leadership cohort through New American Leaders for the past year made up of immigrant and first generation elected leaders from across the country. It has helped me continue to reflect on my leadership abilities and practices. Finally, I rely on my family and my faith, my kids and husband, and my two incredible sisters who have always believed in me.