



Questionnaire for Mayor and City Council Candidates 2021

Candidate Name: Sylvester Williams

Date: 8/14/2021

Position Sought: Durham City Council - Ward 2

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

The Pandemic has severely impacted landlords and tenants. Many people have requested assistance and have yet to receive any assistance. I have talked with local governmental leaders and non-profits about an adequate way of addressing the problems. Responses from the local government have been too biased and fail to address the population in Durham suffering the most. I talked with the head of one non-profit and was told that over 300 applications were put in for assistance and not a single one got a response. Durhamites that have lived here for decades are being forced out due to either increasing taxes or increasing rents. They were the ones that paved the way for new businesses to come to Durham and now they are being forced out. Instead of tax valuations being every four years they return to the old tax valuations of every eight years and new businesses entering Durham should agree to help pay for affordable housing. Defunding the police is more political than practical. With homicides escalating in Durham there is a need to increase the number of police officers as requested by the previous Police Chief Davis. In addition discrimination in the city of Durham has got to stop, whether it is based on socio-economic standing, race, beliefs in Christ Jesus the Only Begotten Son of the Living God or education.

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

Racial discrimination, homicides and housing. Because the black population through the legacy of Jim Crow has suffered, programs need to be put in place to address the decades long discrimination. Reparations in the city have been no more than talk with no action. The bulk of the discrimination was initiated by governmental leaders. Areas that have been decimated by

Jim Crow laws should receive funding to restore what Jim Crow laws took away.

In addition, Durham was founded on the Christian faith in Christ Jesus the Only Begotten Son of the Living God.. Trinity College which was the forerunner of Duke University, National Religious Training School and **Chautauqua** for the Colored Race the forerunner to North Carolina Central University and Black Wall Street in the Hayti district which emanated from St Joseph AME were instrumental in the Development of Durham. Now ordinances are being enacted to mitigate the influence of the church, such as building permits for churches being more difficult to get than a building for a bar or restaurant. Discrimination based on ordinances need to be eliminated.

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?

New corporations coming to the city of Durham would be required to pick up a greater tax burden or themselves build affordable housing.to address the problems with housing. I would reach out to more non-profits who are more in touch with the underserved in the city and distribute the money to them that the federal government and state government have already approved.

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?

Have tax evaluations return to 8 years instead of 4 years for residents that have lived in the city for over 10 years. Secondly, put a greater tax burden on corporations coming to Durham to help pay for affordable housing since they are the ones mostly responsible for escalating rents and increasing housing prices.

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)

Have the new corporations pay greater taxes to supplement the cost for housing for those being displaced.

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

Zoning is a facade being used to displace low income people and prevent the building of Churches. I would have zoning based on property values. You should not be able build a million dollar home in a district that had homes that initially priced at less than \$10,000. Many of these senior citizens cannot afford the higher taxes on fixed income.

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?

No. It was a political stunt. In the neighborhoods that need policing the most you are seeing and escalation in homicides. Every life is a valuable life. Until we get homicides and crime under control we need to implement the request for additional officers that former Chief of Police Davis recommended.

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?

I am a pastor that lives in East Durham and I see the benefit from engaging with the young who have given up based on the politics in Durham. Decisions are being made without any inputs from their parents or neighbors. Gun violence oftentimes is because of lack of basic necessities such as food and shelter. As a pastor in the church I see it firsthand. Policies being implemented by the current city council only exacerbates the problem.

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?

Take the money that was supposed to be used for light rail and apply it to public busing.

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?

Practice good hygiene. The governor tried to mandate the number of people that could assemble which was thrown out in the courts. Encourage outdoor activities which not only helps build your immune system but also help to develop a herd immunity. Give tax incentives to businesses that have been affected by the coronavirus based on new employee hired.

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?

Participatory budget has not worked, Money has gone to homosexual groups but not black groups that have been the most hurt by discrimination. I would make that the groups that have the most would be rewarded the most. Young children voting do not have an adequate view of the injustices committed by prior generations.

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

Only women can give birth. A sperm and an egg dictate that there are only two sexes. Only a woman has eggs and only a man has sperm. Of the approximately 8 billion people on the planet, every single one was born from a sperm and an egg.

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 believe in children being educated by any means necessary. Blacks were the initial beneficiaries of charter schools because of discrimination against them in public schools. Any time there is discrimination you will have charter schools.

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?

Christ Jesus the Only Begotten Son of the Living God.