



Questionnaire for City Council Candidates 2023

Candidate Name: Carl Rist
Date: 8/2/2023
Position Sought: Durham City Council (at-large)

Question #1 Why did you decide to run for office? And what do you see as the primary qualities and responsibilities of council members?

I moved to Durham over 30 years ago when I first enrolled in graduate school at Duke University to study public policy. My wife and I loved Durham's vibe and its unique blue-collar history and decided to settle down and raise a family here. Durham is an amazing place to live and gets all kinds of accolades for being an attractive, vibrant and livable city. But we're also pulling apart by race and by class as the pressures of growth and housing unaffordability force long-time residents and younger people to move out. I am running for City Council to reverse these trends. From my perspective, City Council members should have experience with the key issues that face Durham, a track record of making change happen and a clear ideological framework for governing and making decisions. I believe that I have all three. First, I have been a resident of Durham for more than 30 years and, for most of that time, have been active in Durham's political life as a volunteer and board member in numerous local civic organizations, including the People's Alliance. As such, I bring years of experience in working on many of the critical issues that face Durham and extensive relationships built over many years in Durham. In addition, I worked for almost thirty years at Washington, DC-based Prosperity Now (formerly the Corporation for Enterprise Development). The focus of my work was on designing and implementing programmatic innovations and advocating for public policies to promote wealth-building, economic opportunity, and financial inclusion for low-income adults and children across the United States. All of the issues I have worked on professionally – poverty, the

growing gap between rich and poor, and the lack of affordable housing – are issues that face Durham. If elected to the city council, I would bring this important expertise in building economic opportunity and alleviating poverty. Moreover, having worked on these issues nationwide (and, to a lesser extent, globally), I would also bring an understanding of best practices, new ideas, what works and what’s possible from a national perspective. Second, I have demonstrated an ability to accomplish real change through collaboration, organizing, networking, and hard work. Just a few examples of my accomplishments in Durham include launching and leading the Economic Justice team at the People’s Alliance, helping to launch the Durham Living Wage Project (as part of the PA Economic Justice team), successfully advocating with the Durham City Council to include all part-time, seasonal workers in the City’s living wage policy, and enacting a model property tax assistance program for long-time, low-income homeowners in Durham. Third, inspired by the social justice teaching at my church and molded in over 30 years as a People’s Alliance volunteer and leader, I bring a clear progressive lens to my political work, including core values of -- justice, fairness, equity, inclusion, transparency, accountability.

Question #2 What do you see as the City Council’s top 3 governing priorities over the next 4 years? And what specific policies or initiatives would you work to enact in order to address these priorities?

According to the U.S. News and World Report, Raleigh/Durham is the #3 most livable city in the U.S. With the influx of new residents, housing costs have skyrocketed, making Durham unlivable for many long-time residents, especially working class individuals. To combat this, it is critically important that city council focus on more widely-shared economic prosperity. This starts with expanding the City’s current basic income pilot and making it an ongoing commitment of \$600/month for 12 months for each of the roughly 700 formerly incarcerated citizens that return to Durham each year and should also include leveraging the City’s influence to encourage and incent more living wage jobs among private sector businesses. More widely-shared prosperity also includes wealth-building, especially for low-income households. Key strategies include downpayment assistance for first-time, low-income homeowners so they can build wealth in a home, partnering with RIP Medical Debt to erase medical debt for households in Durham (as piloted in Chicago), and endowing nest-egg savings accounts for DPS students starting in kindergarten. Additionally, with violent crime on the rise, Durham must address issues of community safety. Obviously, the only true ways to eliminate crime is to make sure that everyone has the resources they need to thrive. With our current right wing legislature at the state level, it seems unlikely we will have any sort of common sense gun control to help in this fight. Still, city council can focus on expanding the HEART program to 24 hours a day instead of the current 12, investing in violence interrupter programs like Bull City United, and fight against the effects of poverty by investing in shared economic prosperity. Lastly, I believe it is important to address not only climate justice, but also environmental justice. The recent news of toxic lead in the soil in multiple city parks is just the latest episode of environmental harm in low-income communities in Durham and must be resolved urgently and transparently. In addition, the City has a climate action plan to address climate change locally, with clear goals for powering City operations with renewable energy sources. What’s missing from the plan, though, is a larger strategy to take advantage of the massive federal investments approved via the Infrastructure

Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. In particular, Durham needs to: 1) develop a specific strategy around the green jobs and workforce skills necessary to support the large infrastructure investments funded by the federal government, and 2) develop a strategy to ensure that Durham is prepared to access additional funding made available via the Inflation Reduction Act to address environmental justice and support consumers in reducing carbon consumption.

Question #3 In 2021 and 2022 North Carolina and the Durham area ranked within the top three in the country for net growth in people moving to the area. What's your plan to address the housing needs of the large influx of people coming to the city while trying to stem the number of long-term residents that are being pushed to the edges of the county or into neighboring counties?

In Durham and other major and medium-sized cities, enormous market forces are driving this trend of rapid gentrification and housing inaffordability. With a Republican supermajority in the general assembly, preemption laws prevent us from enacting more equitable taxation policies as well as inclusionary zoning. Still, city council has tools at its disposal to address this problem. I recommend at least four strategies to address Durham's housing needs:

- Continue to develop additional permanent supportive housing for Durham's most vulnerable residents -- those experiencing homelessness. This is not inexpensive and will require more public investment,
- Provide support for the Durham Housing Authority and local housing non-profits to use the City's housing bond funds to build thousands of affordable rental units,
- Provide downpayment assistance for first-time, low-income homebuyers (the recently authorized housing bond funds 20-year, 0%-interest second mortgages to promote affordable homeownership, but the initiative is overdue), and
- Encourage private development of affordable housing using the city's planning and zoning authority and by common-sense changes to the existing code.

What's more, to protect existing homeowners from being priced out of rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods, the city and county should expand the property tax assistance program, for which I helped to advocate. This program is targeted to long-term, low-income homeowners across Durham.

Question #4 Do you support the full expansion of the H.E.A.R.T. program by 2026 to be fully staffed and offer 24/7 services city wide? Why or why not?

I enthusiastically support increasing the HEART program. HEART ensures that citizens in crisis get the help they need, while allowing the Police Department to focus on fighting gun violence in communities of color. I commend the city council's recent decision to expand HEART city-wide for 12 hours/day, and if it proves successful in enhancing public safety, I would support a 24-hour expansion.

Question #5 Gun violence is high on many voters' minds due to the uptick in mass shooting events and neighborhood shootings, both of their reverberating impacts in our

communities, and the lack of will of North Carolina's General Assembly to adequately address the issue. Please state your understanding of the root causes of gun violence in Durham. What steps do you believe Durham City Council could take to help curb gun violence and its impacts?

True community safety can only be achieved when everyone has a good-paying job, affordable health care, a fantastic school for their children, and an affordable house to sleep in. Every elected official should work towards this goal. We also need to get firearms off the streets with sensible gun laws. Unfortunately, our Republican supermajority makes this implausible and just this session made things worse by eliminating the requirement of a state background check when purchasing a handgun. I support data-driven tools to curb violence and look forward to analyzing the data on the effectiveness of Shotspotter, a technology solution in which Durham has invested. Ideally, though, the City should make use of data to identify how best to address the root causes of crime. In looking at crime by location, for example, we can identify what high crime neighborhoods lack that lower crime neighborhoods have. These might include a lack of access to fresh, healthy food, decreased access to affordable childcare, lack of transit options that could enable people to travel to jobs, lack of investments in affordable and accessible activities for youth. While policing has its place, it is important that we drill down to the underlying problems and fix those in order to achieve long term crime reduction.

Question #6 When tensions are high in a group of your colleagues, what are the values and practices that guide your interactions with others who have different ideas and stances than yours?

Durham is no longer the quiet, Southern town many of us grew up or moved to. Durham is now the fourth largest city in the ninth largest state in the U.S. Our community needs first-class public leadership for our first-class city. In meeting with voters across Durham since I launched my campaign in April, one thing is clear -- the people of Durham are impatient with the current council and eager for their city council to focus on the real challenges before us. In over 30 years in Durham, I've served on many boards, including the Self-Help Credit Union, NC Child, the People's Alliance, and the session of First Presbyterian Church's. Trust is the foundation of relationships. "Trust moves collaboration," as the saying goes. If elected, I would routinely take the time to "break bread" with my fellow council members, city officials, and community stakeholders to discuss important city issues. This is crucial because civic work and political consensus-building are too demanding and complex to occur only in public meetings. Finally, my personal style is that I am content to lead from behind and don't need the spotlight.

Question #7 In the 2023-24 Durham city budget, \$10 million was allocated to revitalizing Hayti. In the past few decades, many revitalization efforts in rapidly growing cities have become the beginnings of gentrification of historically Black and Brown neighborhoods. How would you ensure that this does not happen in Hayti, and that Hayti's working class Black people and long-term residents will benefit from the revitalization efforts?

It is certainly the case that revitalization efforts in fast-growing cities have often led to gentrification of historically Black and brown neighborhoods. As the City begins to allocate funds for the planned revitalization of Hayti, Durham leaders and residents must be prepared to prevent gentrification. There are several tools for resisting gentrification that Durham should consider:

- Community land trusts. In Tulsa, OK, which plans to decommission a freeway that previously tore through the Black community of Greenwood. The land reclaimed from the freeway will be placed in a community trust to benefit the community over the long-haul.
- Community benefits agreements. CBAs have been used effectively in other communities, such as Los Angeles, to ensure specific community benefits, such as affordable housing, jobs or public spaces, when large redevelopment projects take place.
- Owner-occupied or limited equity cooperative housing. When residents have an ownership stake in their property, they have greater leverage if property values rise. Prioritizing owner-occupied or cooperative housing in the redevelopment of Hayti is an important tool to battle gentrification.

Question #8 Simplifying Codes for More Affordable Development (SCAD) has been a controversial proposed amendment put before City Council this year. There doesn't seem to be disagreement about the need to reform Durham's development codes (zoning, parking, etc.). The main points of contention seem to be how the codes should be amended, what the role and plan for community input is, and who gets to benefit the most from changed codes. The amending of codes will impact Durhamites' lives in significant ways. How will you ensure the amended development codes will guarantee meaningful community input in decisions about developments? What will you do to ensure that amended development codes will reduce the negative environmental impact of new developments?

We need more tools, rather than fewer, in addressing the housing shortage. Reforming Durham's development codes is certainly one of those tools. In amending our development codes, there are a couple of ways to change the process to guarantee meaningful community input. First, assuming we continue to allow private text amendments (basically the process that SCAD is following), we include some basic standards or processes which any private text amendment would need to follow in order to gain approval. Second, and more importantly, the city manager should establish a procedure by which the City's planning staff regularly proposes (perhaps twice per year) needed changes to the development code, thereby reducing the need for private text amendments.

Planning and zoning decisions often involve complicated trade-offs between competing goals, including housing affordability, environmental protection, and impact on existing infrastructure. I am well aware of these trade-offs and have been involved over the years with other People's Alliance members in opposing a number of large, controversial zoning cases that had significant environmental impacts, including Southpoint Mall, New Hope Commons, and the Southern Durham Development project near Jordan Lake. If elected to council, reducing the negative

environmental impact of new developments would be a key priority of mine.

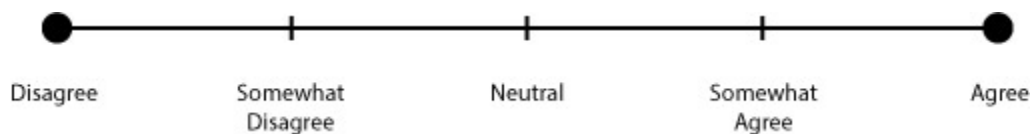
Question #9 Currently, 30 states and Washington, D.C., have raised their minimum wages above the national floor (\$7.25/hour). Meanwhile, North Carolina workers have been stuck with a wage floor of \$7.25 an hour since 2008 and a \$2.13 tipped hourly wage. As the cost of living continues to rise, these wages are not enough to afford basic necessities.

On average in North Carolina, a household of two adults and two children needs to earn a \$33.25 hourly wage to afford the basics—more than four times the current minimum wage. Would you support a resolution stating that the state’s minimum wage should be \$17 an hour and that tipped wages (\$2.13/hour) should be eliminated? Why or why not?

I would absolutely support a resolution proposing a raise to the state’s minimum wage to \$17/hour and eliminating tipped employment. But beyond a resolution, I will continue to work to raise the wage floor for working families in Durham. As mentioned earlier, I helped to launch the Durham Living Wage Project, which encourages private employers to pay at least the City’s living wage standard (currently \$17.60/hour), and will continue to support the efforts of the DLWP to certify more Durham-based employers. In addition, as a member of the DLWP’s steering committee, I have also been a part of the Raising Wages NC advocacy campaign, which is currently working to build support for raising NC’s minimum wage.

Question #10 This past year the Council adopted a budget that included funding for a Vision Zero Coordinator and more than \$40 million in projects to make walking and biking safer in Durham. However, there remain extensive gaps in the networks of well-maintained sidewalks, safe street crossings, and protected bike lanes.

On the following scale, indicate how much you agree to support annual funding to complete city-wide networks of sidewalks, safe street crossings, and protected bike lanes and to bring sidewalk conditions and accessible curb ramps up to standard. Please explain your response.



I am a member of BikeDurham and was a strong supporter of the efforts of BikeDurham and City Councilwoman Javiera Caballero to include funding for a Vision Zero coordinator in this year’s city budget. If elected, I would be a strong supporter of significant annual investments in our sidewalk and bike networks. Sidewalks and bike lanes provide a healthy and sustainable way to move around the city and also to connect to transit services that link with regional employment and retail hubs. In addition to these kinds of annual investments, the City much also deliver on accountability in making them. On annual surveys, residents tend to give the city

low grades on key transportation investments. One way to assess Durham's performance in making needed transportation investments would be to join the North Carolina Benchmarking 2.0 Project at the UNC School of Government, which compares service data and performance trends across a wide range of city services. Durham is one of the few large cities that does not already participate.

Question #11 The Fiscal Year 2023-24 city budget includes funds to keep bus transportation free which benefits many of our working-class residents. What is your plan to continue lessening the transportation cost burdens on working class residents and increasing their access to means of moving around the city in a safe and timely manner?

I supported the decision to keep the City's buses fare-free for 2023-24. This is an important progressive policy win for working families in Durham, and if elected, I would continue to support this. In addition, expanding bus routes and improving reliable bus service are additional ways to improve the ability of working class residents to move about Durham. Finally, to help working class residents move about the wider Triangle, I would prioritize investments in bus rapid transit (BRT) over commuter rail, particularly given the time needed to build commuter rail and the shifting federal support towards BRT and away from commuter rail.

Question #12 There are state restrictions placed on the city's ability to raise property taxes on the wealthiest residents in order to increase the city's income. What are ways you'd work with council members to creatively increase the city's income? What would be your top priorities for the money to go towards if the city's income was increased?

The state mandates that all property be assessed at the same rate, thus preventing the City/County of Durham from charging higher property taxes on the wealthiest residents. As a result, property taxes are mildly regressive, meaning that lower-income residents pay a higher share of their income on property taxes than higher-income residents. That means that any time the City raises property taxes, lower-income residents are hit harder. That's why I worked with Stella Adams, Steve Schewel, Jillian Johnson and others to establish the low-income homeowner tax assistance program. This is just one creative solution to minimizing the impact of regressive property taxes, which are the largest source of revenue for our local government. With the expansion of programs like this, Durham will be better positioned to raise taxes without putting a tremendous burden on our most vulnerable residents. If elected, one creative strategy for raising revenue would be to insure that all new developments are properly recorded on the tax rolls and billed the appropriate tax bill. I find it puzzling in the most recent budget year that the City's total revenues increased, though the largest share of increased revenue came from sales taxes. One of the benefits of rapid development should be an equally rapid growth in property tax revenues. If we were able to increase city revenues, I think the first step needs to be ensuring that all city staff are paid fair and competitive wages. This was, without a doubt, the most contentious part of the budget negotiation this past year, and while I supported voting for the budget as proposed, I also recognize that everyone deserves a living wage to be able to support their families. More specifically, I believe it is best for everyone if our city staff is able to

live in the city where they work, and I would prioritize wage increases for all city staff effected by the pandemic related step freezes. As noted above, I also would support expanding the HEART program and advocate for expanding the City's current basic income pilot (Excel) into an ongoing commitment to provide all returning citizens with basic income for 12 months.

Question #13 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 Budgeting has been an incredible way to engage people in democracy in a way that feels real and concrete. While this level of democratic power is not possible in all governmental decision making, I believe it's critically important to ensure that people feel their voice is heard by their representatives. For me, this looks like meeting with a wide range of stakeholders on a regular basis to get input that might be different from the people who live in my neighborhood, frequent the same coffee shops I do, or share my hobbies. I am a practiced listener, and while I recognize the importance of studying policy and making wise decisions, I also want to ensure that I am listening to all the voices in the room, especially when those voices are delivering hard truths.

Question #14 Like any other rapidly-growing city, Durham is facing complex issues with multiple stakeholders and no simple solutions. What is your plan for seeking input from community organizations on these issues and incorporating their constituency's perspectives in the difficult choices that you will have to make as a council member?

During my time working in Durham's political sphere, I have built an extensive web of relationships. Many are aware that I have worked with the People's Alliance for over 30 years. During that time, I was able to found the Durham Living Wage Project along with people from varying backgrounds. I worked with members of the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People to advocate for the low-income homeowners tax assistance program that has allowed so many longtime Durham residents to stay in their homes despite rapid gentrification. Similar to these examples of collaboration, I believe every person deserves a seat at the table. I have learned to remain solution-oriented despite philosophical differences, and this strategy is already impacting real people in very significant ways. I intend to meet with representatives from major stakeholder groups regularly to ensure that I am getting feedback, and I believe in the power of listening, truly listening, to perspectives different than my own.