



Questionnaire for City Council Candidates 2023

Candidate Name: JJ Campbell
Date: 8/1/2023
Position Sought: Durham City Council

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 wasn't raised here, but I want my daughter to be. My slogan is "People are More Important" and it seems that our government officials have forgotten that. I think that the most important qualities of a council member are listening and learning. No one has the time to be an expert on everything and the city council has the responsibility to balance the conflicting needs and desires of their constituents.

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?

Seeing the difficulties that have plagued our council I believe the top priority needs to be better ways to listen to the people and the transparency that goes along with that. I would immediately begin working towards ranked choice voting at the city level with the hopes of it spreading to other cities and up to the state to help combat the ills of gerrymandering. I would also begin work on a website where every registered voter would be able to vote on every policy that crosses my desk and those results will be publicly displayed in real time. I will hold myself accountable to those results and if I ever vote against the people I will have 1 week to write an essay explaining why, and I hate writing essays. If my essay is not accepted, by vote, then I will have one more chance before having to hold a public meeting to face my constituents.

My next priority is equitable, sustainable, and smart development. Durham is a ripe fruit for developers and they have taken advantage of us. Developers need to be required to contribute their fair share to connecting bike lanes, preserving the environment, building mixed income neighborhoods, creating affordable housing, preventing displacement, building green spaces, and take into account future plans for potential transit infrastructure.

My next priority is equitable distribution of infrastructure investments. I live in North Durham and this is a clear and present problem. One update in particular, because it deals directly with protecting my wife who bikes to work, is connecting bike routes across the city. For a relatively small investment, and combined with improvements in transit, we can start eliminating the need for cars. This will reduce congestion, save on road repair costs, fight climate change, lower the cost of living, and give a boost to small businesses that people typically drive past without seeing.

Having said all this, I would like to reiterate that my goal is not to push my own ideas through, but to move us closer to government for the people and by the people. I learned while working as the technical director of a non-profit doing power-generating playgrounds in Ghana that the ideas that come from the people are 1000 times more effective than a “better” idea without the local buy in. Transit and bikes are only useful if they are used.

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?

To protect public green spaces, reduce car dependency, and make housing more affordable we need to increase population density and make sure that development plans take into account the local residents and provide for those displaced. I was talking with one man about 9 families who were ousted to build a 200 unit complex. If legal, I see no reason that one of the requirements for the developers would be to give those families 9 of the units at a rate close to their previous monthly expenses.

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?

Of course. I dream of a world where no one is afraid of the cops and this is a great step in that direction.

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?

I have lived on four continents. Personally, I believe that the root cause of most local crime and violence is fear and despair. Meeting Maslov's basic needs and providing people, particularly children, with a listening ear and valid hope that their lives will improve and that the lives of their children will be even better than their own is hard to do, but is incredible at diffusing anger and building healthy communities. I am not an expert though and welcome community input and peer reviewed research to help us craft policies to eliminate gun violence.

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?

"People are More Important" is not just a campaign slogan, it is our family motto. Conflict is important for communities, but it should be civil and approached with an understanding that at the end of the day people are more important. Due to the difficult nature of this job I hope that me and my colleagues will be able to regularly spend time together helping the community outside of our meetings to build up our trust, our connections, and our love so that when conflicts arise we can focus on the issues and on getting to equitable solutions.

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?

The first thing I would do is go and talk with them. Attend church, go out to eat, knock on doors, and meet them wherever they gather. I would try to figure out what they want, what they need, what is important to them, and how they would go about revitalizing their area.

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?

Returning to my previous answers, I will take to the community. Before I'm done with it the people will have a chance to vote on it because they deserve more input than just who sits in

the chair. It might take a little longer to pass, but I think it will lead to a more equitable final deal. To help protect the environment I would like to include at the table those scientists and public employees who are specifically working on it. The Neuse Waterdog, similar to an axolotl, is in trouble and even the silt runoff from development could push them over the brink. If we damage the environment trying to build cheaply then the cost down the road to clean and fix things will end up costing far more than we save.

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?

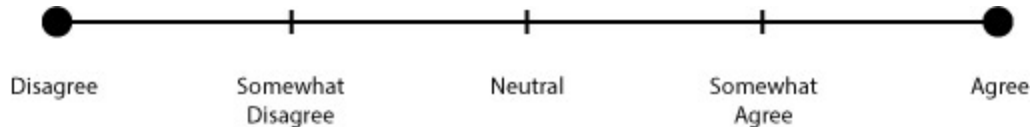
Yes. Everyone deserves a living wage and inflation (greedflation) has crippled our people. I believe it will reduce crime, reduce homelessness, reduce domestic violence, improve kids test scores (indirectly by letting more parents be there to help teach their kids at home), and spur local economies. If I had that system in place to allow people to directly vote on issues crossing my desk, I think that the majority of North Carolina would be in favor of it.

Before campaigning to my constituents to convince them to vote to have me support this I would like more information. I want to know where these numbers came from and what assumptions are being made. I want to know the effect of similar minimum wage hikes on the states that have passed them and how it affected their rural populations as well as their cities.

In general, I'd prefer to see a repeal of the law that limited municipalities from setting their own minimum wages. I believe in government by and for the people and that works best when the people in government are your neighbors.

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.



This is one of my top priorities. A city well connected by bike, foot, and transit has much more potential for sustainable growth. It helps the environment, a necessity with the given climate problems. It helps the small shops by slowing people down enough to see them. It makes housing more affordable and can facilitate mixed income neighborhoods. It fosters community as neighbors come into contact more often. It improves health by keeping people more active. It reduces traffic congestion which can also improve emergency response times. It encourages protection of green spaces. In general, a city that is well connected by safe paths is simply better.

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 had a roommate who had a master's degree in transportation. I love rail, but he taught me that dedicated bus lanes with priority sensors on lights can be cheaper, faster, more reliable, and more flexible since the route can change as needed. This is just one example of why I would defer this question to the experts and to the public. I believe such dedicated lanes combined with express buses, particularly between towns, and fixed location publicly accessible bikes could all combine to keep the working class moving.

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?

Easy part first. I would prioritize raising compensation for city employees to be compatible with a living wage, connecting bike routes, and improving transit.

Now for the hard part. The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now. I would like to try to use the gravitas of my position to campaign to raise voluntary funds from the wealthy to build a city trust fund. It would be outside the government and wouldn't be allowed to participate in politics, but a portion of the generated interest would be used in similar ways to a university trust fund. By separating this from the government I hope that it will encourage more of the wealthy to pay their fair share and support our city's future

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?

If elected I will immediately begin working towards a system where all registered voters (and unregistered voters, although the numbers will be counted separately) can cast their votes on everything that crosses my desk. The tallies will be public and everyone will be able to see how well our votes line up with the voice of the people. If I fail to vote according to the will of the people then I will hold myself responsible to them through essays and meetings.

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?

I am a scientist. I will always seek out the opinions and input of experts. I was a dolphin trainer. Relationships have to come before the work. I helped start two non-profits. Top down solutions only work in a dictatorship. I was a tall ship sailor. Preparation and coordination are not just important, but they can save lives.

In my first month in office I will meet with as many civic groups, PACs, churches, public employees, experts, and officials to try and build relationships so that I can connect with them and involve them when tough decisions come. I will work to help identify and clear obstacles from others paths so that they will hopefully help me when I run into the seemingly impossible. I will listen to the experts and to the community to seek creative solutions. I will invite key stakeholders to the table to debate and compromise. In the end, I will let the citizens vote on every issue that crosses my desk. I may campaign to make it easier to vote the way I wish, but I will be held accountable for every vote, not just the one that gets me a seat at the table.