



Questionnaire for City Council Candidates 2023

Candidate Name: Javiera Caballero

Date: 8/1/2023

Position Sought: 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?

Durham needs someone with a smart, progressive policy vision, strong co-governance skills, experience in leading and advancing bold policies, and a voice for the Latino/a/e community and immigrants more broadly.

We are the legislative body elected to enact and implement policy for City residents. All 7 members have equal power in their voting ability with the mayor being the chair of the Council. Our most important responsibility is passing an annual budget. Those are the basics but that is not the full scope or reality of being a City Council Member. Residents have entrusted us to govern effectively. That translates to working collaboratively with my colleagues and staff to do the best for Durham. I have always sought to work collaboratively. It's one of my main beliefs in leadership and attributes as a leader.

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?

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 believe leadership that incorporates many voices and ideas makes the result stronger because more folks feel committed to the vision and ideas being implemented.

Some of the policies I would like to fund and implement to continue that vision are:

- The design and implementation of the city's next affordable housing plan. Our current plan- Forever Home Durham is excellent. It includes the money from the historic affordable housing bond we passed in 2019. That plan is for five years, and all the money has been allocated. Our commitment to affordable housing must continue. I would like to put another affordable housing bond in front of the voters within the next 2 years. It needs to include more money for 4% gap financing than the \$15 million that was allocated in the 2019 affordable housing bond, and we need more dedicated funds for permanent supportive housing units.
- Continue expanding the HEART program to a 24 hour /7 day a week service citywide. Also expanding the types of 911 calls that the HEART team can respond to and launch a civilian traffic unit pilot now that House Bill 140 has passed in the General Assembly
- Approve a Green & equitable infrastructure bond to focus on safe and accessible bike infrastructure and pedestrian infrastructure, as well as Durham parks, including the Splash & Play Project for the redevelopment of Long Meadow, East End, and Wheels Fun Park

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?

My plan is to find practical solutions to increasing the affordable housing stock in Durham. I spoke a bit in question #1 about one policy goal I have to help with housing affordability for residents who will need dedicated affordable housing. I think the other big opportunity is with our updated Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). The UDO will get updated after the Comprehensive Plan is adopted. The UDO is the set of rules we have as a city for building. We consistently hear from the development community that they would like a quicker, more predictable process and they would not mind providing more of the development commitments that neighbors say they want if there was that possibility. Earlier this year during one of City Council's deep dives on housing the City Attorney's office provided transparent excellent guidance on what we are allowed to do- what authority we have been given by the General Assembly. We have broad powers to incentivize but not to demand things like affordable housing. I would like a process that if developers/builders commit to things like solar panels or other sustainable building practices, more tree save than required, affordable housing etc., they're on a different pathway created for projects to move quickly through our development process. I would also like to get permission from the NC Building Code Council to allow triplexes and quads to be in the residential code vs. the commercial code, single stair buildings, and mass timber construction to name a few areas where I think there's real potential to impact housing and building affordability.

While I believe all of this would improve affordability for many residents, we will never be able to meet the need without partners at the state level. We are prohibited from using so many of the tools that would help like inclusionary zoning, rent control, or charging higher property taxes for luxury properties.

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?

Yes. I have been a vocal supporter of the HEART program and the creation of the Community Safety Department. I'm proud of our multi-pronged approach to community safety. This work is some of the most critically important work we have accomplished as a city. The expansion of the HEART program will continue over the next several years and to be fully successful we need Durham County and Durham Public Schools to be partners in this work. I'm also looking forward to the recommendation that the Community Safety and Wellness Task Force will be providing all 3 governing boards in the next few months.

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?

Durham has grown tremendously, especially this last decade. Statistically we are a more affluent community than we were 10-20 years ago but the gap between residents who are doing well and those who are struggling to meet their basic needs keeps widening. Housing affordability is affecting many who have lived more comfortably before such as city workers. We know much of the violence in our city happens in neighborhoods that have been historically disinvested in. We know that often both the perpetrators and victims of that violence are victims of systemic racism and societal neglect. The City of Durham has made important improvements and increased resources in those neighborhoods especially in the last five years, but we must do more. The city, county, and Durham Public Schools must work more closely together to make sure we are offering more youth programming, access and connection to different types of supports including mental health support, and ensuring kids know as they reach adulthood, they have access to jobs that pay well and training to be qualified for them. I think this will help many of our kids know they can have a different future. Durham has also done incredible work with our Misdemeanor Diversion Program for our kids who have made mistakes. We need to continue to build off successes like that. All of this will help but without the intervention of both the state and federal government to limit access to guns Durham and cities across the US will keep experiencing the devastating gun violence we've been experiencing.

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?

In general, I try to work to find where there is commonality and where we can collaborate on an issue that is important to Durham residents. I do believe there also has to be the desire and temperament to collaborate and govern effectively though and those sensibilities come down to each individual council member.

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?

I think there is always that risk and it's important to be transparent about it. I also know that the city and residents alike are much more aware of those risks than when projects like Southside were developed. We have a good joint city/county property tax relief program that can help long-term residents with their property tax bill which is incredibly important to offset the burden of increased property value due to increased investments in their neighborhood.

We are also doing community engagement in Hayti and have been for a while and following the city's equitable engagement Blueprint, which I believe has been very successful ensuring that the city is engaging with and seeking feedback from residents and changing city projects based on that feedback. Finally, residents are very aware and have become excellent at advocating for their needs. I can think of several projects across Durham that changed significantly because of resident feedback. Braggtown has done excellent work advocating for their needs and ensuring development projects in their neighborhood provide real community benefits from more 30% AMI units in affordable housing projects to bus shelters.

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?

Currently we have a process called a privately initiated text amendment that is the process through which SCAD was introduced. That process is open to all- residents or organizations alike- but its limitations are that there are fees associated with it. The SCAD applicants oversaw any community engagement not the city because it was not a city-initiated amendment. The city, the county, the Planning Commission, and the Board of Adjustment can and have all made changes to our Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) (UDO are our rules for building) also through the text amendment process. All text amendments regardless of how they were

introduced go through Joint City-County Planning Commission, Planning Commission, are advertised to the community, and have a public hearing at Planning Commission, at Board of County Commission, and at City Council. Once the Comprehensive Plan is adopted the Planning Department will begin rewriting the UDO. It would be during this process where we can evaluate if having a privately initiated text amendment process is something that we no longer want. My only caution would be that if an organization such as Trees Durham decided they wanted to introduce a privately initiated text amendment to push for stricter tree save rules our current process would allow that if we stripped that mechanism moving forward it could affect all residents and organizations.

Text amendment changes change the rules for building (the UDO). Most building that happens, be it a larger neighborhood or an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is often what is called by right development. That means it's following the UDO there would be little community input in that type of situation because the community input would have occurred during the creation or change to the UDO. As Durham rewrites its UDO there will be community engagement just as there was during the update to the Comprehensive Plan.

Community input is also incorporated when a developer or landowner is asking for a change to the rules for their project- a developer may want to have a denser project than what was originally allowed, or they may want to change the zoning designation from residential to commercial or vice versa. Those are typically rezonings.

In those cases, there is a different process, and those types of cases go to the Planning Commission and eventually to the City Council who has the power to approve or deny the rezoning. The Planning Department uses a tool called Social Pinpoint to allow more opportunity for residents to weigh in and share their thoughts about development projects. We must also follow all state statutes about notifying the public on rezonings, the Planning Commission hears the case and provides their input, and finally it makes it to the City Council.

We have often amended the UDO to add more stringent environmental rules to our UDO. Earlier this year we passed revisions to the city and county's Sedimentation and Erosion Control standards. We did this at the express request of community members concerned about runoff from construction sites mostly in Southeast Durham County. These residents did not go through a privately initiated text amendment process. They advocated for the changes they wanted, and planning staff incorporated many of their requests into our updated standards.

As for the environmental impact of the proposed SCAD amendments. Many of those proposed updates affect infill development, basically development that's happening closer to the city center. While I think resident engagement and robust discussion is a good thing, it is unclear to me how improving our land use policies to allow more density, make more land usable on many lots, and eliminate parking mandates isn't environmentally beneficial. Many of the proposed amendments in SCAD align with what I've heard from Planning Commissioners for years. I have consistently heard we need our land use policies to move away from suburban sprawl to encourage bikeability and walkability. You can't achieve those goals without denser development. There are components to SCAD that I have questions about, and it will have a public hearing in front of City Council and the Board of County Commissioners like all text amendments to the UDO. Finally, with the rewrite of the UDO, if there are parts of SCAD that

pass and make it into our current UDO but ultimately are not helpful, we can make sure not to include them in the new UDO.

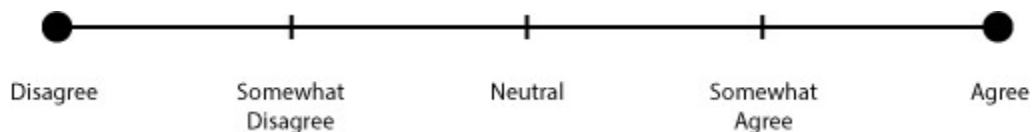
Question #9 Currently, 30 states and Washington, D.C., have raised their minimum wages above the national floor (\$7.25/hour). Meanwhile, North Carolina workers have been stuck with a wage floor of \$7.25 an hour since 2008 and a \$2.13 tipped hourly wage. As the cost of living continues to rise, these 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, I would support a resolution. Additionally, if we were able to get an increase at the state level any updates to minimum wage law needs to include the ability for cities to increase their minimum wage past the state’s minimum wage. In many locations across NC the cost of living is even higher than \$17 an hour. The city’s hourly wage is now \$18.45. Durham County’s is over \$19 an hour. We consistently hear from city workers that they need higher pay and to compete with other municipalities for workers we are going to have to increase city worker pay.

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.



Agree and if there were a Strongly Agree option I would have chosen it. Having a truly walkable/bikeable city is so important for many reasons. It is important to have a multi-modal transit system for those residents who are cost-burdened, but I believe a good transit network—excellent bike and pedestrian infrastructure, a robust local bus system, and a regional transit system must be priorities. We need residents of all income levels to choose not to use a car to get around.

I’m proud of the current commitment in this Fiscal Year’s budget. We have improved our commitments over time but this year in particular the amounts allocated to bike and pedestrian infrastructure were incredible. We will need to continue being this aggressive with city

resources. It's also why I would like to do an infrastructure bond, which I discussed in question number one.

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 think increasing our connectivity to transit with great bike and pedestrian infrastructure will help all residents get around the city more safely and provide more options besides having to get into a car to go from point A to point B. And while our buses are fare free, we have a lot of work to do expanding our routes and increasing the frequency on many of them. We need a more robust local bus system that supports more residents' ability to use transit and helps our cost-burdened residents significantly.

I also know many cities across the US are helping residents either purchase electric bikes or have a strong city eBike program where residents can rent eBikes and it's either free or very low-cost. The city had a very small pilot earlier late in 2022 providing free eBikes to residents for a dedicated amount of time to learn more what residents' experiences were like using eBikes and what opportunities there are for the city moving forward.

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?

Recently the Sport Commission presented to the City Council at a City Council Work Session. They are hoping that there could be funding from the city, the county and private investment for a new multi-sports complex intended mostly for youth sports. As a parent who has had to travel all over the state for youth sports, I know many Durham residents would appreciate better facilities in Durham. And I see the potential of how it could generate revenue.

<https://abc11.com/durham-sports-complex-city-council-discover/13359559/>

The city Council also funded a feasibility study in our current fiscal year's budget for a new convention center. Historically I have been skeptical about these types of investments. My opinion has shifted on them because we are so limited in how we are allowed to raise revenue. Our needs as a community are only increasing. Our commitments to affordable housing and improved infrastructure must keep increasing but we also have to be careful that we are not burdening the very households we're trying to help with property taxes that are too high.

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?

This fall we are bringing back community conversations. We have not done them for several years. Community Conversation lets us bring resident voices and ideas into our budget process. We changed their timing to occur in the fall vs the spring. This will help community members have an opportunity to share what their priorities before the budget process begins.

I would like all city residents regardless of documentation status to be able to vote in Municipal elections. This is something that would have to be changed at the state level because we do not have the authority to make those changes locally. Other communities across the United States have made these changes and it's been successful. I think it aligns well with one of the goals of Participatory Budgeting which is to bring in more city residents into democratic processes.

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?

My plan is to continue to do what I've been doing since joining the City Council. I regularly meet with all kinds of residents and organizations. I go to community meetings and attend community events. I have visited neighborhoods when neighbors have had a concern about a development project. I have gone to talk with student and youth organizations about local government and what the role and responsibilities of the City Council are. I went to eviction court proceedings so I could observe and connect residents to legal supports. I have done ride alongs with police officers, joined the HEART team during staff meetings and participated in Participatory Budgeting voting events. All of this is to hear from residents, staff, and organizations about what their ideas are, what concerns they may have, and how local government can do better. What are the policies we can implement to make Durham better. This year has been an extremely challenging year to be on the City Council. In some ways it's been even harder than when we had a presidency that was targeting so many neighbors and communities across Durham or when the pandemic started, and we had gotten very little support from the federal government, and it was very unclear if we ever would. But I am clear on my purpose and the work of improving ALL of Durham residents' lives. The work has always centered me and it always will.