



Questionnaire for City Council Candidates 2023

Candidate Name: Khalilah Karim
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?

As a Regional Field Director for PowerUP NC, I have worked extensively on environmental sustainability and housing construction. This lends itself well to the current moment that Durham is in, experiencing rapid growth, a shortage of housing, and a pressing need for environmental sustainability. I believe that looking at environmental sustainability and economic development through a racial equity lens will allow us to truly build a Durham for all. I've also come to understand just how important local government is in impacting residents' daily lives. With a background as an organizer and field director, I understand just how important it is to develop relationships. I try to focus on where the other person is coming from and focus on moving us towards a solution. I believe the work of council includes deep listening – to each other and staff, but especially constituents. We're all on the same team in desiring what's best for Durham, and while we frequently disagree on how to get there, understanding where another person is coming from is the first step to finding a solution.

I also believe the work of the city council is to make tough choices. While I am a big fan of compromise, there are certainly situations where a compromise can't be had. In these situations, it is important for council members to lean into their underlying values and trust in the reasons people elected them, regardless of how popular a single vote is.

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?

Durham is currently dealing with three pressing issues: community, environment, and economy. In our current mental health crisis, there is no doubt we all need to build our **community**. Access to greenspaces, quality youth programming, and even fresh, high quality food varies widely across our city. Crisis response programs such as the HEART program are vital to ensuring people are getting the help they need rather than become victims of overpolicing. Still, investments in preventive programs are critically important to helping people find and build their own communities and keeping us all safe.

With all of us feeling the current effects of climate change, the need for aggressive action on **environmental sustainability** is critically important. From green infrastructure in building (such as solar panels) to ensuring access to alternate means of transportation (such as bike lanes and covered bus stops), Durham needs to be investing in our future. Providing fare-free buses is a great first step, but it's simply not enough. We need more inter-city transportation options, and we can use funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to create them.

While much of the **economy** in Durham is "booming", the middle class is disappearing. As large tech companies come to town, our neighborhoods, especially historically Black neighborhoods, are reeling from the effects of rapid gentrification. People who have called Durham home for generations are being displaced, and Black homeownership is declining. The reality is that Black and brown Durhamites are being pushed further to the margins of our economy and are unable to build wealth for their families due to systemic inequality and policies that don't center their experiences and needs. Strategic investments in affordable housing, down payment assistance for first time homebuyers, and low-income property tax assistance can allow Black and brown families to build wealth and set their children up for success.

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?

Black home ownership is currently on the decline, and there is a marked disparity between white and Black home ownership. Durham needs policies that provide additional avenues for Black home ownership. I believe in encouraging developers to contribute more to the community than they take. We must require development that embraces the neighborhood it is entering and makes room for preexisting cultures. We must ensure that the neighborhood's Black homeowners gain equity as a result of the rising property values instead of being pushed out. Durham needs investments to keep long-time Durham residents who may have fixed

incomes and are underpaid.

We've reached a crisis point that is challenging to address because of rapid growth and its resulting social and environmental challenges. The environment must be prioritized, but people also need a warm place to sleep at night. Due to a Republican supermajority at the state level limiting our options and available tools, it is critically important that Durham use every tool at our disposal to prioritize environmental sustainability while also fostering development that meets the needs of our community. First, this includes working behind the scenes to guarantee that the ideas put out to city council are the best that our developers can come up with in terms of cost and sustainability. A second priority would be to increase density within the urban core while investing in public green spaces. Thirdly, it's crucial to take harm reduction into account when zoning petitions are made. Proposals should be considered with present zoning taken into account as well as the development's potential effects on the neighborhood.

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 strongly support the HEART program and other alternatives to policing, and I would support expanding it to provide 24-hour service and involve more team members. There is a time and a place for police work, but it's important to acknowledge the numerous instances in which the presence of armed law enforcement creates harms rather than benefits.

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?

The root causes of gun violence in Durham are the same as they are throughout the US - unfettered access to guns due to a lack of effective gun control legislation, alongside a lack of access to the economic, educational, and social opportunities that people need to thrive. In the end, policing and law enforcement struggle to effectively handle the issue of violent crime because they don't deal with the underlying causes. While unarmed crisis response units such as the HEART program are a vital resource, Durham also needs investments in true crime prevention. This means, we need bold investment in wrap-around services, employment, juvenile assistance, and skill development to allow every member of the Durham community to lead happy, healthy, and productive lives..

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?

As an organizer I have been able to work with a multitude of people from different backgrounds.

I believe everyone has something to offer. Reaching a consensus is certainly easier when everyone sees eye to eye, but it doesn't give you the complexity of the actual community. Having diverse thoughts helps you see others' views and gives you a better understanding of why that issue is important. Through these conversations more holistic and effective solutions can be created and implemented.

As a practice, I believe in deep listening and open dialogue. This helps you understand people and where they are coming from. Then, I believe in inviting everyone to the table to truly find solutions. We may not always agree. In fact, we rarely, if ever, will. But recognizing the intentions of others – that we all just want the best for Durham, even if we have drastically different views of what that means – should allow us to find solutions that work for everyone.

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?

Gentrification is always a concern with increased investment in a historically under resourced community. Still, Black and brown businesses often suffer from a tremendous lack of capital, and withholding investment into their communities is not a viable solution either. Still, there are a few ways we can mitigate risks of gentrification and subsequent displacement. They are as follows:

- Land banking. This will allow long-term residents to reap the benefits of property value increases instead of just the harms
- Ensuring long-term residents, working class, and Black people are part of the decision making process, not just corporate interests and landowners.
- Expanding the low-income property tax assistance program to allow long-term homeowners to benefit from the increased equity and wealth building without having to suffer from an increased tax burden.

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?

Transparency, accessibility and community input are the biggest things communities need from the city and developers to be a part of the process. If we are not transparent in who is eligible to apply and how to apply for funding then we will continue to only get big firms that put profits over

people. If meeting dates and community input sessions are not advertised or confusing to find on a website then we are limiting the amount of people who can join and voice their opinions. Community input is one of the biggest things needed around development because it gives a voice to the people it directly impacts. I will push for these three things in all development so communities who are usually left out will be a part of the process.

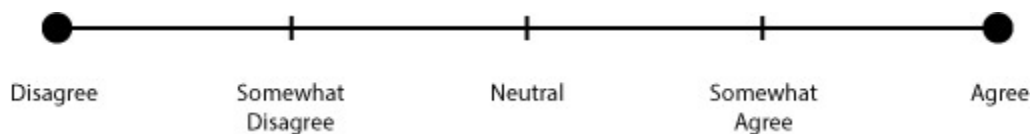
Question #9 Currently, 30 states and Washington, D.C., have raised their minimum wages above the national floor (\$7.25/hour). Meanwhile, North Carolina workers have been stuck with a wage floor of \$7.25 an hour since 2008 and a \$2.13 tipped hourly wage. As the cost of living continues to rise, these 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 absolutely support this resolution. While working for the Service Employees International Union, I was able to fight along fast food workers, retail workers, and others in the “Fight for \$15”. I do believe in strategic investments in affordable housing and down payment assistance, but I also recognize that we cannot subsidize our way out of poverty wages. Everyone deserves a living wage. Full stop.

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. Investments in multi-modal transportation, and especially environmentally sustainable transportation, is absolutely vital from both a community and environmental perspective. While I recognize the expense this would bring to the city, I also recognize that we must secure the future for our children and generations to come, which means divesting from a car-centric, fossil fuel reliant view of transportation.

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?

Fare free buses are critically important to working-class families, and while I am fortunate to live directly off a bus line, I understand that many Durham residents can only travel to their jobs, grocery stores, and schools by car. I appreciate the current council's commitment to ensuring fare free buses, and I am committed to doing the same. Our bus system also needs more investment in additional routes, more frequent service, better regional service options, and better bus stops. If this requires a tax increase, I am open to that possibility, while also investing in programs that would offset that tax burden for some of our most vulnerable populations.

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?

Though I don't have anything against tax increases in theory, I am also aware that the increased tax burden due to gentrification is displacing some of our most vulnerable groups, including the elderly, the disabled, and working-class Black and brown neighborhoods. It is crucial to raise taxes in a way that ensures fairness for underserved groups, as Durham will probably need to do during the upcoming City Council term. To be able to raise taxes fairly, the low income homeowner tax relief program must be expanded.

Council members can also raise outside funding for the city, for example through philanthropic and state/federal grant opportunities, creating partnerships with large wealthy local institutions like Duke University, and encouraging developers to make proffers to the affordable housing fund. Hosting festivals, conventions, sports, and other large events can also help bring in resources through sales and occupancy taxes.

My top priorities for additional investments would be affordable housing, sustainability initiatives, and community safety programming.

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 is currently the only community engagement process in city government that gives residents the ability to directly decide how to spend public money. This kind of democracy is a great goal to strive for, but it also takes a lot of work to make it happen. While it's not practical to make all government decisions with this level of direct democracy, I believe expanding the PB program would be a good step toward bringing more people into the city's decision-making processes. The PB budget has remained the same, at \$2.4M, for its third cycle, while the city budget has grown by \$100M over that time. I will also encourage a diversity of residents to apply for positions on our city's boards and commissions. I am particularly

interested in elevating the voices of people from marginalized communities on our board and commissions and engaging more youth in this work. I was happy to learn that the city now provides stipends to offset the cost of participation to enable more working-class people to participate as well.

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 believe that it is important to balance the needs of development with the needs of our existing residents and our environmental goals. When I decide whether to approve or deny a rezoning request, I will consider things like relative affordability of the housing for the region, the environmental practices the developer is proposing to use. Would it uplift or push out residents? Does this development plan have benefits for residents and what other benefits are developers willing to give? These questions aren't new and other established organizations have been asking them for years. It is my job to be in communication with groups on the ground doing the work so I can have real insight on how development will affect certain communities.