



Questionnaire for City Council Candidates 2023

Candidate Name: Sherri Zann Rosenthal

Date: 7/2/23

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?

I am a true believer in the power and potential of our City government. I retired in 2020 as Durham's Deputy City Attorney. I made a career in local government because it affects our daily lives and the current big issues we face the most of any level of government. Land use, habitat protection, storm water and water supply, the terrible state of our roads, and public safety—all of these are most affected by our City government. It upsets me to see our City government so debilitated right now, and with my long history and understanding of how this organization works, I believe I can help.

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?

Comprehensive Housing Plan for Affordability

Lots of candidates talk about affordable housing. I am the only candidate who's actually created housing. I developed a 22-home neighborhood that's an environmental model, and the

most energy-efficient in NC. I created the legal side of the City's subsidized affordable housing programs. The need is so great, taxpayers can't afford to finance it all. We need an overall housing plan that documents what kinds of housing we already have, in what price ranges and where. Then we can use planning and development authority to approve re-zoning for the housing we need, as well as combining municipal authority to disrupt the predatory low-end rental market, and accomplish other housing goals.. Current Council members talk about affordability, but have voted for virtually every rezoning and annexation proposed by developers. Willy-nilly is not a housing plan, and trickle-down housing is as bogus as trickle-down economics.

Safety

Our community won't really thrive until we get a handle on violence. We need a 3-part approach: 1. Job opportunity and education for youth with expanded evening recreation; 2. HEART, plus policing centered on de-escalation; 3. Fix 911. Call 911 today, sometimes no one answers. It's been like that for over four years, and our 911 Center doesn't meet national minimum standards! Simply unacceptable.

Safe Roads, Clean Water

Core services need to be maintained consistently and cost-efficiently. Our city's roads are bad essentially by design, because their maintenance is not funded. In the non-suburban parts of the City, the road base no longer has good load-bearing capacity. Putting asphalt on it is a cosmetic waste of money. The City Council has diverted money into flashier things than maintaining road base. The result? We have a deferred maintenance hole to dig out of. Similarly, we use about a million gallons a day more than our two reservoirs provide. The back up, Jordan Lake, is an inferior water source with more pollution. Neglect is more expensive in the long run than consistently and efficiently taking care of our infrastructure.

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 Question 2, I described a Comprehensive Plan for Housing. Right now, Durham doesn't even have a plan for its own subsidized housing, let alone a strategic plan for all housing. We've got to use all forms of our municipal authority in a coherent strategy to: 1. Create more private market affordable housing. 2. Integrate the inventory of sensitive environmental places into our rezoning and development approval process, to negotiate for what we need to preserve habitat, protect water resources and avoid flooding, and repair past environmental damage. 3. Create a walkable, bikeable City and a great bus rapid transit system. 4. Disrupt the predatory low end private rental market. We also need to note that we're going to have a

big demographic shift as the Baby Boomers age out of single family homes, and take this into account.

Please re-examine your assumption about continued population growth. In addition to an influx of people, many people LEAVE Durham, and the net is not a huge increase in population, according to Dataworks. While some politicians have called out numbers of people coming to Durham, it has been used as a way to justify approving about everything developers want. In reality, our black and brown population is being displaced at an accelerating rate. We need specific, coherent policies to protect our existing neighbors and provide for their needs. Investment and renewal, not displacement and demolition.

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 love the idea of the HEART program. I also am committed to government that has metrics for each program's success, and either changes or ends programs that don't work—even if they were great in theory. By 2026, we should know if HEART is fulfilling its mission, and if it is hitting its metrics. If so, I absolutely would want to expand it to 24/7. We should take into account that this is an innovative program, and effectiveness might start out uneven and improve as there are lessons learned and adjustments made.

However, consider this: HEART is a crisis intervention program. The state has largely defunded mental health care, specifically the residential facilities that used to provide mental health care. HEART isn't enough. Our city government needs to call out the defunding of mental health services and push for ongoing care, especially for people who can't afford increasingly scarce private mental health care. This is what our residents who need mental health services and their families also need.

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?

Gun violence in Durham is too high, and absolutely tragic. At the same time, the number of shootings is actually down this year compared to the two prior years. We've all been through a traumatic time with COVID and its economic dislocations—as well as illness and death. Stress is still high. It sure doesn't help that the General Assembly is committed to making guns more and more available without permits.

I would favor increased job opportunities and community support by: 1. Improved evening Parks and Rec programs for youth, and other programs in places teens feel safe and welcome,

including day trips. 2. High school vocational programs in coordination with Durham Tech. 3. Specific gang/organized crime intervention by the police. 4. Get the repeat bad actors out of the neighborhoods. Community members are frustrated, knowing who these people are and having them be arrested and released repeatedly.

There are people who know more about this than I do, and I would reach out for their opinions. Honestly, every answer I give could have this sentence added: Our community together comes up with better solutions than any one person, and I am well-aware that while I have ideas, solutions need to come from true, up-front community engagement that is systematically incorporated into government.

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?

I am direct and open about my ideas, including when I disagree, but also always learning in every conversation. My values and practices include: 1. Minimizing third party conversation. Whatever I have to say is stated openly. 2. No 'drive-by' character assassination. It should be about public policy and ideas, not the identity or character of individuals. I don't embed snipes at anyone into what I say. 3. One of the most helpful things I ever learned was the equation, "Frustrated expectations yields upset." I know as a short woman who has opinions, I am already frustrating some men's expectations about how I 'should' be! So, I've learned to give people time, not to draw conclusions from early interactions. I try to be as clear as possible from early on in negotiations, when expectations are most flexible, and not add major items to negotiations later, if it can be avoided. I am greatly influenced by the late Chuck Davis, who really practiced, "Peace, love and respect for everybody." Chuck was an opinionated guy! However, our own opinions can be held firmly without disrespecting others.

Right now, I'm trying to set the stage for a more collegial City Council by reaching out to each of the candidates, to meet and get to know them as people.

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?

When 'revitalization' is focused on housing, that housing absolutely should be restricted by income, with affordability covenants of no less than 20 years, and 30 years used to be usual. Income should be capped at less than 80% of HUD's Area Median Income, and I suggest 65%, because our SMSA includes Chapel Hill, which has higher income that distorts the median income figure. This also should not be transitory low income, such as students whose parental income would not qualify for affordable housing.

For commercial development revitalization, we should consider requiring ownership of the business to be local, and other measures to ensure that Durham tax dollars go to benefit Durham residents.

The long-term resident grant is okay, but actually does little for long-term retention of Black legacy homes and avoid predatory development and building. It doesn't deal with the reality that cash flow is a major problem for low-wealth households, so that a leaking roof or failed heating/air conditioning system creates a home ownership crisis. We need a coherent, realistic policy of inter-twined programs that will keep families in place, preserve and build integer-generational wealth, and preserve these homes—in good condition—as part of the naturally-occurring affordable housing stock.

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?

You may know that I have been an outspoken critic of SCAD, which deregulates developers in many ways. Developers don't want to have to face a closed gate and ask, "May I?" However, it is precisely by having a closed gate for re-zoning and development plan approval that the City has the leverage to keep the gate closed until developers offer up the affordability and environmental protections that are crucial to keeping Durham Durham. When I wrote in Question 5's answer about "up-front community engagement," I have something specific in mind.

I believe every significant policy initiative in Durham should start with a citizen engagement forum that comes to a rough consensus about the values and prioritization of those values for the initiative. I have lead many workshops of this kind, and participated in some that were up to almost 300 participants. We don't have to invent the wheel: the state of Oregon has a whole section of its university system devoted to studying public participation plans. Our School of Government in Chapel Hill has several staff members who work with local governments to create participatory government processes. The result of these sessions is transparent: a public record is created of the prioritized values, and the solutions staff then proposes can be measured against them.

When I worked for the City of Durham, I tried to get this up-front citizen engagement enacted.

I actually had a City Manager interested, and it was shut down at the City Council level. We will need People Power to push City Council members to do this, because Council members who are part of a controlling majority often want to avoid anything that limits their power to wheel and deal behind the scenes.

Our planning department reports on proposed developments need to include a lot more information on the ecological impacts of what's proposed. For example, we can include information from the Durham inventory of environmentally sensitive places.

I'm developing a Durham Development Scorecard, created under the auspices of the Eno River Association Advocacy Committee, of which I'm a member. One of the problems we've run into (I'm working with a Duke Public Policy grad student) is that even basic questions about environmental, community and economic impacts of a project can't be answered by looking at the re-zoning or development plan applications. This points to a possible need to change our application documents so that the community and Council can actually consider these impacts.

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?

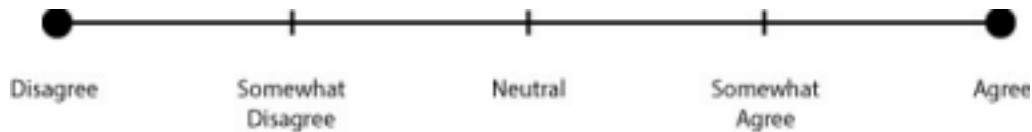
Absolutely the current minimum wage is sinful, and doesn't fulfill the whole point of having a minimum wage. I fully support \$17 an hour, and think for the reasons you've stated that figure isn't enough.

I wrote the City of Durham's livable wage ordinance. While the General Assembly struck down the portion that required City contractors to pay the livable wage, the part that applies to the City's own workers is still in effect. It minimum wage that City workers can be paid. I wrote it to be indexed to third party data, and to require the Human Resources department to update it annually.

The argument that increasing the minimum wage will eliminate jobs strikes me as bogus. In reality, it creates a fair floor for businesses to compete. Employers will try to eliminate jobs if they can, anyway. There is no excuse for the government to allow the reinstatement of slave wagery.

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 very much support Vision Zero, for which we've waited too long. In the Durham Youth Listening Report from 2021, a very clear transportation takeaway was that current conditions for walking and biking are dangerous, people feared and experienced harassment, especially girls and women, and the buses were seen as unreliable and unclean, as well as sometimes unsafe. Some respondents said the nearest bus stop was more than a mile from their home. I think these responses also represent the views of adult residents who would often like to be less dependent on individual cars.

Some of this is also democracy in the built environment: curb ramps and City facilities often don't have the accessibility for those with different physical abilities that they should, sometimes not even meeting ADA standards. To get away from so much auto traffic is also important for ecological sustainability. At the same time, we have a lot of needs, and if I was on Council, I would look carefully at balancing the money spent on various needs.

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?

We really need a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system with good inter-city connections. It is such a frustration that our City Council continued pouring money into GoTriangle and its predecessor's three failed rail system attempts.

If Durham had a responsive BRT system with good inter-city connections, and it was safe and clean, we would get much broader ridership than the bus system currently has. Also, GoTriangle's current Youth Pass needs to be much better publicized and more easily

accessed.

I'm not sure free trips are necessary, but keeping all trips low cost and subsidized is. We need to have a full-fledged system that allows people to feel comfortable going car-free.

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 City has a long history of the tax valuations for suburban properties being less, as a percentage of fair market value, than the valuations in more urban areas. We should pull all valuations to fair market values, especially with this information being so easily available these days.

Big institutional and financial players are benefiting by big money flows into—and out of—Durham. We need direct negotiations to have more of this money benefit the community as on-going practice.

We've got a lot of needs. Increased income should be split between things like dealing with the deferred maintenance needs of infrastructure and safety nets for our low-wealth residents.

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?

See my answer to Question 8. I loved the idea of Participatory Budgeting, however in practice I think it is a cul-de-sac, and its voting and allocation process is not transparent.

True community engagement needs to be front-loaded, consistently-applied, and integrated into the processes of government.

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?

See my answer to Question 8 and immediately above.

While community organizations are very valuable and their input should be considered, they shouldn't get more power and priority than the direct input of residents themselves. For

example, the Durham Association of Realtors should not get 45 minutes to address Council on SCAD, while the InterNeighborhood Council was given zero protected time of that kind. Those are the kind of games that have been played in the past, including the past few months, and I don't see that as true community engagement.