

**PA PAC Questionnaire for
Durham Board of County Commissioners – 2020**

Please return the completed form along with your resume or biographical statement describing education, work history, community service, and prior political experience as soon as possible, but by January 5 at the latest.

You may e-mail your responses to Tom Miller at tom-miller1@nc.rr.com or you may send a printed copy of your responses to PA PAC c/o Tom Miller 1110 Virginia Avenue, Durham, NC 27705-3262

Please note that following the January 5 deadline, the People's Alliance PAC may publish your responses to this questionnaire and your resume.

When answering this questionnaire, please repeat the questions in your response document with each question numbered and organized as it appears here. Type your responses in italics, bold, or a different font to distinguish your responses from the questions. Do not use colors or shading.

Please try to confine your responses to no more than 300 words unless another word limit is indicated. Do not feel obliged to exhaust the limit for each question.

If you use words or ideas from another person, please attribute your source.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire and your willingness to serve the people of Durham.

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Government and the Public Good

1. Of all the issues confronting Durham County, which single issue is most important to you and why? What would you do about it if you are elected?

The single most critical issue facing all of Durham city and county is the issue of safety. It is a topic that is discussed in almost every conversation that I have both personal and professional. Many in our community lament the almost 24/7 news coverage of gun violence this year that has occurred both day and night all over the County. As a result, many residents are on edge and are actually fearful to execute even their normal, daily routines. Many do not feel safe in their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and public spaces such as parks and shopping areas. We know this issue is not unique to our county but is one that is being experienced nationwide, but that does not mean we should accept it as the norm for our community. Therefore, it is important that we acknowledge the situation and be leaders in bringing the community together to collectively address our fears.

Tackling this issue should not be left to only law enforcement agencies to resolve but the community as a whole should address the issue and collectively strategize to determine what we

need to feel safe as a community. So, as a County Commissioner, I would encourage that conversation - not just to talk or point fingers but one that produces action with partners willing to provide resources for implementation with an understanding that just more money for officers is not the only answer. Specifically, I would suggest initiating this "conversation" in partnership with the Sheriff who also has previously shared strategies focused on addressing neighborhood safety and a reduction in gun violence. Design and implementation of those and other strategies would likely require the involvement of several community partners and would be the "spark" necessary for a community approach to addressing this critical issue.

2. How can county government use its authority and its resources to direct jobs to those who most need them and to lift the wages of the lowest-paid workers in Durham?

When county government uses its tax dollars to provide incentives to private corporations for relocation and expansion in our county they can require that any new jobs or a significant percentage of those jobs be made available to workers in our community at a livable wage. Similarly, they can require that existing jobs also be retained in the case of expansion or revitalization at a livable wage.

Also, when contracting for public services the county can require that all third-party contractors performing services on behalf of the county pay their workers a living wage as designated in a written agreement. In 2019, that livable wage rate is \$15.46 per hour. It is my understanding that the county currently pays its employees no less than the livable wage rate per hour and they should use all means available to them to encourage the same of all employers in the County.

3. If elected, how will you guard against the power, access, and influence of wealthy special interests? How can county government hold such interests accountable for their actions?

Wealthy special interests naturally try to use their wealth to influence public decisions and thus public policy. Thus, as a county commissioner it will be important to be available and open to actively engaging and listening to all voices when developing public policy. To accomplish this, a commissioner must not be seen as a representative of any particular special interest group but rather as a representative of the general population at large that is their constituency. Therefore, a county commissioner must be transparent in their associations in order to be viewed as a neutral entity, open to all ideas. They also must be willing to not accept large campaign donations from wealthy special interest groups they may be viewed as purchasers of power and access.

Educating Our Children

4. What issues do you see with school construction and student school assignment? What role should race equity play with regard to school construction and student assignment?

What we are beginning to see in Durham is plans for new school construction are focusing on building neighborhood schools outside of the city core that will serve mostly middle and upper class students currently attending schools that are becoming or projected to become overcrowded in the near future. This is being done while there are underutilized schools in the city core serving primarily children of color and those of low wealth that could be used through student reassignment to help ease overcrowding and more evenly distribute the student population in the County. The resulting pattern, if this persist, will be in effect a re-segregation of schools. This

occurs by isolating those in underutilized schools from those in the neighborhood schools thus creating a racial and socio-economic imbalance.

It is incumbent upon the County and the school system to look at the impact the need for racial equity has on this issue. There must be an acknowledgement of the racial inequities inherent in the trends noted in the previous paragraph and then a genuine effort to “level the playing field” to achieve a balance between racial and socio-economic influences impacting construction and student assignment that ultimately impact student achievement either positively or negatively.

5. What role should charter schools play in public education in Durham County? What are the issues associated with charter schools and what should be done to address them?

Charter schools described as a form of publicly funded schools that allow innovative and creative approaches to learning that match the learning styles and interests of students and their parents. They provide a “choice” option within the public education arena. Ideally, charter schools in Durham should operate with this purpose. There were 14 charter schools in Durham serving approximately 5,500 students in the 2019-2020 school year. For Durham, some charter schools can offer the diverse or unique learning models that some students need to maintain interest in school and thus be more likely to successfully complete school. This could be helpful as the system seeks to promote improvements in the performance of students achieving below grade level.

However, in most counties including Durham, prior to the current school year, the expansion of charter schools has been indicated as the reason for the decline in enrollment in the Durham Public School System which has caused a decline in the amount of public funding available for the public school system. Additionally, charter schools have been able to “cherry-pick” students that are more likely to succeed which has often resulted in a lack of racial and socio-economic diversity in charter schools.

To combat these and other issues, I have read of attempts by the Durham Public Schools to “partner” with the charter schools in Durham community in past years to address some of these concerns together and determine how to “co-exist” while working together to meet our students’ needs. Unfortunately, those efforts have been unsuccessful to date. However, I believe that a “meeting of the minds” between the two entities will be the only way to resolve some of these inherent consequences of charter school traditional recruitment and operations.

Housing, Planning, and Neighborhoods

6. What planning policies and priorities do you wish to see emerge from the on-going review and revision of Durham’s Comprehensive Plan and Uniform Development Ordinance?

The priorities I would like to see from this revision is an indication of specific corridors that are designated for revitalization, particularly those that lead to downtown from traditional neighborhoods such as the Fayetteville Street corridor. I also think there are parts of the County that are ripe for commercial (and residential) development/re-development such as East Durham and parts of North Durham. There should be some priorities included to encourage this development. We should also have some affordable housing goals that would provide the

inclusion of affordable units in new developments and a requirement for replacement 1:1 of units due lost to residential or commercial development.

Transportation is another priority area with an affordable option for transportation to RDU Airport at a reasonable rate included as one goal. There are also “pockets” in the county not currently being served by public transportation that need to be addressed.

7. What, if anything, should be done to promote meaningful engagement of ordinary residents and neighborhoods in planning and zoning issues in city-county planning?

This is an interesting question, after having attended one of the EngageDurham sessions last fall regarding Durham’s Comprehensive Plan proposed revision that was so well attended that the group was too large for the room, so the group had to be placed in two rooms. It was quite refreshing to see so many county residents interested in Durham’s future. As a result, there were a plethora of ideas/priorities presented by the attendees and I learned a lot about what residents would like to see in the county. I believe the same sort of process could be used to discuss planning and zoning issues in the city and county. Perhaps the issues are not as large as a comprehensive plan itself is, however, there are general planning policy areas that could lend itself to the type of dialogue generated by the Comprehensive Plan listening sessions. Also, having more than one way to engage could be useful as well. For instance, in-person listening sessions as well as electronic commenting could be useful tools.

8. What should Durham County government do to promote housing affordability?

The County should continue to provide county owned land as available for the development of affordable housing as has done with 300 and 500 E. Main Street recently. The County should also consider providing funding for that can provide gap financing for affordable housing development projects in the County to help keep the housing costs affordable for renters and homebuyers.

Additionally, as noted above, the County should encourage developers through incentives to provide a percentage of new housing developed in the County as affordable units.

County Finances, Transportation, Incentives, and Services

9. What is the most important thing that is not currently being funded by county? Would you be willing to raise taxes to fund this item?

Affordable Housing is a major issue in our community and is not currently being funded by the county. As noted above, in addition to providing county-owned property, I think the county should make a financial investment in the development and/or revitalization of affordable housing, particularly rental housing, to help keep the development costs low and thereby keep rents lower for the potential consumer. I would be willing to explore dedicating a portion of the tax rate to fund a dedicated Housing Fund in the County for this and other specific housing development and preservation purposes.

10. What is your position on providing public incentives to private firms to promote economic development in Durham? How can county government use development incentives to promote more widely shared prosperity, including better jobs and higher wages for Durham residents?

I believe that the investment of public dollars to private corporations is justified if the proposed project provides new jobs, increases the tax base, revitalizes existing neighborhoods or buildings, sustains/expands existing businesses or creates new businesses. I think county government can provide these incentives in a way that promotes more prosperity by requiring new companies to employ or provide first options for employment to Durham residents or a certain percentage of county residents. Additionally, the County can require companies expanding their businesses to retain their current workers and perhaps provide training opportunities for advancement to their employees that would position them to take advantage of promotional opportunities that may arise from the business expansion. Companies could also be encouraged to work with the local Workforce Development Board and the Community College to design training programs that would develop the talent pipeline necessary for the projected employee needs of the company.

11. What non-traditional programs (such as public banking, community investment trusts, community development venture capital) could Durham County implement to reduce economic inequality in our community?

I am not familiar enough with these non-traditional programs to assess their potential impacts.

12. What should be the principal components of a new public transit plan for Durham County?

The principal components should include the following:

- *Establishment of a Community Workgroup with technical staff support;*
- *Evaluation of the Current System;*
- *Conduct a Needs Assessment to include a survey of on-board users and potential users as well as community leaders and the general public;*
- *Analysis of Travel Patterns*
- *Identification of Transportation Routes*
- *Fiscal Analysis/Forecasting/Budgeting*
- *Implementation Plan w/Timeline*
- *Public Review and Comment Period*
- *Formal Approval by Elected Officials*
- *Implementation*
- *Evaluation*

13. What, if anything, should the county do to distribute the property tax burden with greater equity and fairness?

Given the general regressive nature of the property tax, I don't think there is anything that the county can statutorily do to distribute the property tax with greater equity and fairness.

Justice and Law Enforcement

14. How do you define community safety? What are the most effective ways for the county to build and preserve community safety throughout all the communities in Durham County?

I define community safety as a general security felt by residents in their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and public spaces. When residents feel safe they feel free to leave their homes, sit in their yards, allow their children to play outside, take walks, etc. without fear of harm. I think that the most effective ways to build a sense of community safety is to involve the residents in identifying what specifically would make them feel safe in their community and then working with them to acquire what they need.

I say this because often times, we ask the general question – Do you feel safe in your community? – which usually receives a yes or no answer. But we don't ask why or why not. That, I think is really the question because the answer will help us identify how we can help communities feel safe since there I don't think there is a "one size fits all" answer to that question. So, when this question asks the most effective ways, I think there are multiple ways depending on the community.

15. Are you satisfied with Sheriff's Office, including its administrative, law enforcement, security, and detention functions? Should county government increase or decrease resources allocated to the Sheriff's Office? Please explain your answer.

I am satisfied with the Sheriff's office and am in support of county government increasing its allocation of resources to the Department to enable the Sheriff to implement the initiatives included in his platform when he was elected, particularly those related to safety as noted in previous answers. Many of the issues such as the general concerns about safety and the need for community engagement were included in his platform and I believe could provide a starting place for the county to address some of our community wide concerns.

16. What, if anything, should Durham County do to promote restorative justice?

I believe Durham County does promote restorative justice now by providing funding through the Criminal Justice Resource Center for the Misdemeanor Diversion Program and should continue to do so. Restorative Justice is a practical way for those that cause harm to atone for their actions with the person harmed and thereby achieve complete reconciliation which I believe is a humane alternative to incarceration.

Health Care and Social Services

17. How can Durham County improve mental health services in our community?

Mental health services in Durham can be improved by continuing to invest in local mental health programs beyond the funding provided by the state. Further, the County has continuously collaborated with Alliance Behavioral Health Services along with other partners such as city government, Durham Public Schools and Durham Technical Community College to implement programs for youth disconnected from services to help them make the transition into adulthood and other training programs. Case Management services are also a service that is critically needed in the community and the County must continue to provide the financial support necessary to keep that service available. The County's commitment to increase mental health services in the detention center this year is just one example of the increasing need in our community.

Thus, continued investment of local dollars to provide enhanced services above those provided by state funding and continued collaboration will improve mental health services in our community.

Civil Rights

18. Name one issue in Durham that directly impacts, or is directly impacted by, race inequity, and explain how the city can incorporate a race equity framework in addressing this issue?

I remain concerned about the performance of students of color in our public-school system, particularly their tendency to perform below grade levels at higher rates than others in the system. I am not aware of an race equity study ever being undertaken in the Durham public schools as has occurred in other systems in the state and I would really like to see that done here to begin to build a framework to clearly acknowledge the contributing factors and build a framework to address the issue.

19. What is the principal issue facing the Latinx and immigrant communities and how should the county address it?

I think that immigration concerns are the principal issue facing the Latinx and immigrant communities, however, unfortunately I am not certain that the County has an entity is equipped to address this national policy issue.

20. Do you support legislation designed to protect gay, lesbian, and transgender people from discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodation, and access to government benefits and services? *Please limit your answer to 100 words.*

Yes.

Political

21. For whom did you vote for in the 2012 and 2016 presidential and gubernatorial elections? For whom did you vote in the 2016 U. S. Senate election? *Please limit your answer to 100 words.*

I voted for President Barack Obama in 2012 presidential election and Hilary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election. I voted for Walter Dalton in 2012 gubernatorial election and Roy Cooper in the 2016 gubernatorial election. I voted for Deborah Ross in the 2016 US Senate election.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Please do not forget to provide us with your resume or biographical statement.