

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?

As a people there are many critical issues that we are faced with. Simply from the moment we are conceived inequality is bestowed upon us. There has been deliberate injustices placed in policies by the powers that be. Many of us in Durham have no idea how to even begin to fight let alone understand its a war. Our mental state, lack of education, hopelessness, and merely the respect for one another has simply slipped away from us. Even with that said, we can not begin to address those concerns without a stable and safe place to live. WE NEED LIVING WAGES FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING. People of color make up almost 55% of the population here in Durham. If we were afforded the opportunity to live in affordable and safe living conditions (Housing First) we would be to slowly but surely start the process of addressing all of our other concerns from education to public safety and wealth to generational stability.

As county commissioner one of my main goals will be to focus on economic growth and redevelopment. I will focus on strengthening four areas seen as crucial to economic opportunity; jobs and skills, small business expansion, financial health, and neighborhood development. These focus areas aim to:

- a) Target solutions to promote equity for underserved individuals, communities, and businesses.*
- b) Identify and lift up innovative approaches and replicate the most promising solutions.*
- c) Strengthen nonprofit organizations so they are able to serve as enduring resources for their communities.*
- d) Expand on our work skills programs and give more funding to Durham Community College to lift people out of poverty in a way that will not be paying for in their retirement.*

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?

I'd like to push the envelope using incentives and tax breaks to make it a requirement for companies that wish to come here to do business would need to hire a percentage of local residents from our underserved communities. In addition, securing a partnership through Durham Tech and local companies such as IBM to come in and teach courses so individuals can obtain the knowledge and skill set to perform those desired job opportunities.

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?

I am a candidate for the people not special interest groups. When elected I will guard against the power, access, and influence of the wealthy by limiting my interactions with them through a filter, that has our residents best interest at heart. Interacting only when a third party is available to witness the conversation or in a public hearing setting. The county can guard against this by making it plain where they stand on such corruption and influence attempts and by endorsing John Rooks Jr. who's interest are those of the many and not the few.

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?

There is no doubt in my mind that we need more public schools. The issue of construction is not tied to the student school assignments. When we are talking about equitable school construction, we are really talking about short term or long term taxes and who actually benefits from those taxes. Although I prefer to not raising taxes, I would prefer long term taxing as that softens the burden on our current residents who may not use the school.

In my opinion the equitable way to approach school construction and school assignments is to give priority of new construction to our historically disadvantaged neighborhoods. If we truly want it to be equitable the county would work with the school board to purchase land to build schools near historically black neighborhoods.

We should review student assignments through a racial equity lens.

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?

Forgive me on this one! I am honestly disappointed in the overall idea that we have two entities basically at war over the education of our children. OUR KIDS LIVES ARE AT STAKE! I am a product of public schools as is my wife, children and 90% of the people close to me. I do however realize that charter schools have created a more diverse education experience allowing parents to take control of their child's education needs. In doing so, introducing them to the various cultural interests beyond standard curriculum for DPS. We should be working to integrate the charter schools attractiveness in the DPS system.

Of course this is predicated that DPS is poorly underfunded by both state and local funding. If public schools was fully funded by public school advocates I would gladly rethink my position on charter schools.

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?

I wish to see more effort in establishing a more balanced approach to how developers build in our county. I believe the use of design commitments, more required input from the neighborhoods impacted and the need for development plans at the time of application.

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?

Meaningful engagement with 'ordinary residents' should be at the heart of all future planning and zoning decisions. While professional planning oversight to all projects and zoning issues is a necessity I think we tend to side-step 'ordinary residents' desires and concerns in the name of fast tracking future progress.

To truthfully and fully answer this question we need to properly define what is a 'meaningful discussion'. I think our Planning Department staff and Planning Commission is excellent, nationally rated, but they

are limited to the scope of concerns brought up by those people who have access and understanding of the complicated methods of planning the process. At times, these professional developers often move so fast and with such skill that we 'ordinary folk' do not have time to give input and insight on proposed projects. It takes time for neighborhoods to develop a clear and consistent message on what they would like to have done near their homes, in their neighborhood and within their community. We are not so far from the time of the decimation of the Hayti community in the name of progress that we can ignore the process of hearing every voice.

This is not to discredit the efforts the Planning Department that does follow the letter of the law when it comes to zoning changes. The missing piece is meeting people where they are at. While it is convenient for elected officials and staff to meet at City Hall or government spaces to discuss concerns. I find, in talking to 'ordinary residents', the obstacles of transportation, childcare and timing of these public input sessions are too difficult to be helpful.

More sessions within the neighborhoods at times that are convenient to the people that are affected, more opportunities to meet and give strength to the leadership of community led groups and organizations will be my focus if elected.

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

Understanding that State law prevents the most effective ways for County and City government from helping to create affordable housing we are left with the need to find a local fix that works within the bounds of State law while creating thousands of new affordable housing units. The current county plans do a great job of being compliant with state laws but we are not doing so well at creating creative solutions. Market forces will not create affordable housing, we need help from all sectors of housing; community organizations, citizens and private investment to help with the creation of affordable housing not only at 30% AMI but also the so called workforce housing that is desperately needed for our service professionals like teachers, EMS professionals, firefighters and police officers.

As a County Commissioner I will make it a priority to investigate all three sectors for solutions:

With citizens: I would support infill of both the urban and suburban tier. Some rental properties can be converted to create new additional housing through the (EHC) Expanded Housing Choices but we need to avoid some of the pitfalls of the EHC program which at times is not aligned with what individual established neighborhoods desire. I would hope to avoid areas becoming overly developed at such a fast pace that we see a total gentrification of neighborhoods like what is happening on Dowd St. Citizen owned suburban infill is contingent on having an effective master transportation plan that addresses the desire to be downtown with the practicality of more suburban housing. Think north to south expanded transit as well as east to west.

With Community Organizations: I would advocate for additional, and responsible funding, of groups like Durham Community Land Trustees, Habitat for Humanity and CASA in their efforts to create housing that is affordable for 30 years or more. In an equitable approach I would encourage more POC owned community organizations to actively seek assistance from the City-County budget to fulfill the need in spaces not serviced by the groups named above.

With the Private Sector: I would advocate for better cooperation between local government and private locally owned investors to create opportunities for affordable housing development through the use of tax deferments and grants where available.

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?

The county budget reflects a broad amount of funding of several programs that are critically needed. For me it isn't so much that the budget doesn't fund any particular program but that the budget severely underfunds several programs. This is why I feel I need to be on the commission. From a racial equity standpoint the budget doesn't necessarily reflect the needs of the poor, the disadvantaged and the homeless.

The 2019 county budget was \$545m. Of that we spent:

- Around one percent on Durham Technical Community College*
- Less than half of a percent on expanding Pre-K availability for Durham children.*
- Less than half of a percent on Rental Assistance*
- Less than half of a percent on Homeless Services*
- Less than half of a percent on Economic Development for Workforce Training*

These are my budget priorities. Responsible funding of services and programs that address inequality and reduce the education, wealth and health gap are my budgetary priorities. Providing opportunities for everyone to make a living wage and live in a healthy environment that is with dignity and respect are my budget priorities. I do not believe our current budget reflects our residents' values and priorities.

Again I would like to punctuate that I prefer to look for other ways of increasing services without raising taxes. As a growing economy with a tax base whose value is growing faster than the population. I believe we can find ways to meet our challenges without additional taxing through budget adjustments and appreciation of the tax base.

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 think the more public information regarding private firms when it comes to investment in development the better outcomes are. We must remain as transparent as possible with how we plan to move forward with the economic future of our city-county. The city-county can use labor incentives for developers to seek and hire the skilled labor within the city-county and to also train those without skills to help create an empowering skill set. We can also work to increase the minimum wage offered to those working and show a need for their household support. We can decrease the amount of gap between education and work experience by introducing work life balance for those working full time and attending higher education classes.

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?

We could introduce financial literacy classes for economic development and create a dollar for dollar match for investing as residents of lower income learn how to save and manage money. In doing so they become property owners and become tax payers on their property which helps the city receive back their dollar for dollar investments.

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

Principal components of any new public transit plan should utilize new technology and transportation innovation. It's obvious to me that our streets and environment can not sustain the use of fuel buses for mass transportation. We should transition from old technology to new technology.

When planning for a new transit plan the county should pay particular attention to the desires of residents and to plan through a racial equity lens. As we saw with the light rail project racial equity was not a priority. When a light rail has only one terminal east of DPAC we know that planning was not done equitably.

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

The city should allow families and owners to have greater flexibility in their property tax paying by creating a maximum pay tier based off income for the owner and or family. Also creating a tax system that does not tax people based on the possibility of upgrades to a home but the actual construction of the home and its value.

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 can not define universal community safety because it is different for every community. While some communities embrace alternative policing methods there are other communities that feel the need for more presence. For me this is a continuing dialogue between the community, law enforcement, and local government.

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 support Sheriff Birkhead's efforts to build a 21st century sheriff office. It is my understanding that after Sheriff Birkhead took office, he evaluated the needs of the DCSO and made a request to the commissioners based on that evaluation. For the first time, Durham has a sheriff who not only is experienced in law enforcement but has also directed 2 other law enforcement agencies. I would trust the sheriff's request if elected would fully support funding his budget request. As commissioner, I would

also spend time making sure I'm fully educated of the DCSO and all the services they provide to our County. All this is in understanding that our community is growing at the rate of 30 people per day.

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

Restorative justice is one option of many that we should be researching to disrupt the school to prison pipeline.

Health Care and Social Services

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

One approach is to create mobile mental health units that would go out to communities that experience severe trauma in their environment. For example the residents of Durham Housing Authority experience trauma on a daily basis but find going to the Durham Social Services office a major obstacle. A mobile mental health unit meets that meets people where they are at would greatly expand mental health services throughout the county.

It is critical that we expand our bilingual social service staff by making it a priority to hire bilingual employees to reach our Latinx population who are not currently reached or served.

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?

This is a difficult question to answer because every issue in Durham is impacted by race inequity. As a Black man who understands the pervasiveness of systemic racism, it is difficult for me to choose one issue that I would prioritize over another to answer this question. Whether you are looking at housing, education, safety, employment or health outcomes, you will find, (as they teach in racial equity training) that the bookends of every issue are Black and white.

I believe that Durham needs to first, openly acknowledge that race-based disparities exist in the very fabric of the city and commit to instituting measures that directly counter their impact. One way to do this is by creating a standardized checklist that measure the racial impact of policies and proposals brought before the governing body. This checklist will help move individuals away from their personal views and feelings to an agreed upon set of standards that each system is expected to meet.

The city and county should have racial equity commissions that coordinate with each other to examine the multiple issues facing our communities of color and proposes strategies and solutions that can be implemented in both the county and city.

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

Bilingual services and crime reduction in their community are the principal issues facing the Latinx and immigrant communities. The only way to expand bilingual services is by hiring more bilingual public facing employees. In an effort to reduce crimes in Latinx communities, I would investigate and support new initiatives created by Sheriff Berkhead to address these concerns.

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.

I am in support of legislaion designed to protect gay, lesbian, and transgender people from any type of discrimination. I look forward to working towards seriously addressing the fact that the Fair Housing Act does not explicitly protect against discrimination on the basis of sexuality or gender identiy. As an advocate I will continue to fight for the rights of all people.

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.

This is truly a private answer as I go into that voting booth to cast my personal vote. However; I will share the fact that I voted Democrat in both presidential elections and the U.S. Senate election.