

Candidate's name: **Jillian Johnson**

Office for which you have filed for election: **At-large City Council**

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Government and the Public Good

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

I am deeply concerned about the ongoing process of gentrification and displacement that is happening in Durham. The rising cost of housing in the areas around downtown (and increasingly all across Durham) is threatening to change the way our city looks and feels for generations to come. The revitalization of downtown has benefitted many of us, but it has not been without a cost. That cost is being paid by working people across Durham whose neighborhoods are changing into places they can no longer afford to live and where they do not feel welcome. I believe that city government has a moral responsibility to serve all members of our community equally, and we should implement policies that address the negative effects of our development decisions and fairly distribute the benefits of our revitalization.

As a city council member, I will work to provide neighborhood affordable housing in order to ensure that people who have built their lives, raised their families, and found welcoming communities are not displaced. We can do this by:

- 1) Bringing together city resources and nonprofit housing providers to construct both for-sale and rental housing that is affordable for low-income people,**
- 2) Demanding that housing developers who request city funding or significant zoning changes proactively address our affordable housing crisis by providing affordable units as part of their developments,**
- 3) Providing safe and affordable alternative housing for every person living in public housing that is slated to be torn down,**
- 4) Involving members of the communities most affected by these decisions and policies in every step of the process; and**

5) Ensuring that issues of racial equity are addressed in any affordable housing plan.

2. What are the greatest employment needs of Durham's residents? How can city government use its authority and its resources to direct jobs to those who most need them? Be specific.

Many of Durham's residents, particularly people of color and young people, are unemployed or underemployed in low-wage jobs. I believe the city can play a strong role in job training and job placement that will help provide employment to more people. Our summer YouthWork internship program and other workforce development programs play a key role in making opportunities available. I believe our jobs programs should be well-funded and should focus on communities that face the highest levels of unemployment.

When the city provides incentive packages to companies who wish to relocate here, it is important to make sure that the jobs they are providing are safe, pay a living wage, and go to local people. City government can ensure that these mandates are part of any job-creation incentives and that they are strongly enforced. As the number of tech companies in Durham grows, I would also like to see the city partner with local startups to provide training for tech jobs.

There will also be opportunities to create good jobs as we build our light-rail line to Chapel Hill over the next decade. We should start training local people for these jobs now. A partnership between the city, GoTriangle, and local educational institutions is needed to provide residents with the skills training they will need for these future jobs.

There will always be people in our community who are unable to work. Maintaining a strong social safety net will always be important in addition to programs that create good jobs.

3. How can the City Council act to lift the wages of the lowest paid workers in Durham and reduce growing income inequality in our community?

Due to recent changes in state law, Durham's living wage ordinance no longer applies to city contractors, but only to direct city employees. If we are committed to providing good jobs and contractors are not meeting our living wage standards, this is an opportunity to consider the amount of work that is being done by contractors and whether that work could be done by city employees instead. Bringing work in-house allows the city to ensure that wages and working conditions are good and fair and that safety standards are being followed. We should only be hiring contractors who hold themselves to the same standards for wages and working conditions as the city holds itself.

The Durham Living Wage Project has developed an innovative model for raising wages by partnering with local businesses who agree to pay living wages. This model is working for a number of local businesses and is growing in numbers and strength. I support the expansion of this work as well as national movements such as Fight for \$15 who are taking on the problem of underemployment and low wages in the fast food and retail sectors. I believe that the city can play a role in publically supporting these efforts to raise wages and provide stable and secure jobs to everyone.

4. Describe your interest in and commitment to public amenities such as playing fields, open space, and walking and biking trails. Are you willing to raise property taxes to provide for and maintain these amenities?

I believe that public space and public resources are critical to a healthy community. I fully support the use of city funds to maintain and grow public resources that are available to all Durhamites.

Property taxes are a progressive method of funding city services in that those who are most able to pay are asked to pay the most. Fees and sales taxes, on the other hand, are regressive, in that those who are least able to pay are hit hardest. I would support using property tax increases to maintain and expand public services, rather than fees.

It is of concern, however, that as home prices increase, particularly in gentrifying neighborhoods, homeowners may find their property taxes growing at rates they can't afford. We need programs that help low-income and elderly homeowners in this situation remain in their homes. I would also support a reexamination of current city fees to investigate which may have the most regressive impact on our residents, with an eye towards reducing or eliminating the most regressive of these fees.

Housing, City Planning, and Neighborhoods

5. What does "gentrification" mean to you? Where is it happening? What, if anything, should be done about it?

Gentrification is a process where a lower-income urban community, usually predominantly people of color, is replaced by a more affluent community, usually predominantly white. As the number of affluent people in the area grows, businesses move in to serve the new population, increasing the desirability of the area to other affluent people and encouraging even more of them to relocate there. Existing community relationships are disrupted as rising costs force lower-income people to move, and the sense of belonging to the community of these residents is destroyed.

Gentrification is happening in downtown Durham and in neighborhoods surrounding downtown including Cleveland-Holloway, Northeast Central Durham, Old North Durham, West End, Burch Avenue, and others. In these neighborhoods, rents are rising, homes are being renovated and resold at huge profits, and people are being displaced. Gentrification and development are not the same thing, but they often happen in tandem. It is important for cities and communities to consider possible displacement when going through a process of revitalization and take steps to protect low-income residents.

Complicating our situation are NC's state laws around housing and zoning, which have made rent-control and inclusionary zoning, both tools used to great effect in controlling gentrification, illegal at the state level. This requires us to think more creatively about how to protect our communities.

In order to address this situation, we should take the following steps:

- 1) Work with community groups and community leaders to determine the likely impact of each proposed development project with regard to community displacement,**
- 2) Work with community groups and community leaders to determine the likely impact of each proposed development project with regard to racial equity and the well-being of communities of color,**
- 3) Demand a commitment to building affordable housing from developers and, whenever possible, require that developers include affordable units in their projects; and**
- 4) Provide support for families who need help to stay in their homes in gentrifying neighborhoods.**

6. In 2012, the city completed a project to convert the Ninth Street Compact Neighborhood Tier into a design district. Do you support the planning department's current initiative to create new compact neighborhood tiers and to convert compact neighborhood tiers into design districts? What is good about the initiative and what is bad about it? What should be done to fix what is bad?

I generally support the Planning Department's efforts to create new compact neighborhood tiers and to convert compact neighborhood tiers into design districts. Durham is part of one of the fastest growing regions in the country, and that will necessitate dense, more urban development in certain parts of the city. The proposed rail stations along the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Corridor seem like a smart place to start increasing density, since a strong linkage between density and transit could help minimize traffic congestion, improve public health by increasing opportunities to walk,

decrease transportation expenses, connect people who do not have access to cars with jobs, and reduce suburban sprawl and environmental damage.

Viewing this process through a social and racial equity lens, the primary challenge ahead for the city is to satisfy the desire for increased density and walkability in these districts while still maintaining enough leverage to demand equity measures and public goods from developers. Chief among these is affordable housing, but I would also include sustainable building practices, public spaces, green spaces, and public art. For example, in the Downtown Design District the allowable height and density are so high, the City has little leverage to work with developers on inclusion of affordable housing and other public goods.

7. In 2014, the city council adopted a resolution calling for affordable housing near planned transit stations. Do you support the resolution? Would you change it? Should the city grant developer requests for rezonings near transit areas without commitments for affordable housing? Please explain your answers.

I fully support the resolution calling for affordable housing near proposed transit stations. If anything, I would increase the percentage of affordable housing that is required. The ability for low and moderate-income people to live near transit has a significant effect on their ability to participate in the labor force and therefore care for themselves and their families, access resources, and participate in public life. In many cities with developed transportation systems, home values on transit lines directly reflect the easy availability of public transportation. We risk a rapid rise in home prices and rents in these areas and increased displacement if we do not commit to making sure housing there remains affordable.

The city should absolutely not grant requests for rezoning near transit areas without commitments for affordable housing. If the needs of our community are not being met by for-profit developers, we must use our resources and skills to find creative solutions and new ways to meet those needs as a community.

8. What geographic area(s) in Durham need special attention from city government? In those areas, what are the problems and what action should the city take?

I am most concerned about areas of Durham that are experiencing challenges due to poverty and unemployment, as well as areas that are undergoing gentrification. The mayor's anti-poverty initiative in NECD, as well as the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative that will seek to bring more economic development to MacDougal Terrace and the Fayetteville St. area are exciting projects on the horizon that will address needs in these communities. The City Council is already targeting resources to the areas of Durham that

need the most assistance, and I support these initiative and the development of additional projects to reduce poverty in our city.

9. Under what circumstances would you vote to downzone a piece of property? By “downzone,” we mean a rezoning action that would reduce the market value of the land being rezoned.

I think this is a complicated question that would need to be considered jointly by city council, community members, and property owners in the specific area where downzoning was being considered. If height and density regulations for an area are too high, we risk negative impacts on quality of life there. However, downzoning can also negatively impact property values and development possibilities. I would vote to downzone a piece of property if I felt that the potential impacts had been considered appropriately and that downzoning was in the best interest of the city and its residents as a whole.

City Finances, Capital Improvements, Transportation, and City Services

10. The city manager recently gave city council members a list of potential capital improvement projects to prioritize. Of these, what are your top four priorities for capital expenditures? Is there something that you would include in your top four that was not on the manager’s list? Would you be willing to raise property taxes to accomplish your priority projects?

I am personally most interested in projects which promote health & wellness and use of public transit rather than our continued reliance on personal cars for transportation. Following those values, my top four priorities would be 1) Station Area Strategic Infrastructure, which focuses on developing new light rail stations, 2) Sidewalk Projects (DurhamWalks!) which would build new sidewalks, 3) a new large outdoor public aquatic center, and 4) The Duke Beltline Trail, a multi-use trail development project.

I’m concerned however, that council members don’t have enough information about any of these projects to adequately weigh them against one another, specifically with regard to racial/social impact and equity. I think we will need more community input on each of these projects to determine which are really priorities for Durham as a whole.

With regard to any of these specific projects, I would not vote to raise property taxes in order to fund them at this time. However, I am in general willing to use property taxes to fund projects that are determined to be community priorities.

11. The city council recently voted to provide \$11.25 million in public financial support to two private development projects in the downtown area. Did the council make the correct decisions in those cases? Are the projects equally deserving? As a council member, what philosophy will

guide you in deciding whether to provide public financial support to private development enterprises?

I think the city needs to be more proactive in its negotiations with developers in order to ensure that the city as a whole benefits from these projects. The Durham Innovation District seems to have more possibility in terms of public access than the Chesterfield development due to the inclusion of a park, but a privately-owned park is not actually public space.

The city is supporting these developments because of the belief that they will create jobs. I don't believe this in itself is enough to justify giving public dollars to developers. With regard to the construction jobs that will result from the building process itself, as well as the jobs that will be housed in the new buildings after they are ready, we must consider whether the jobs will provide living wages and good working conditions, adhere to reasonable safety standards, and go to local people. Without these guarantees, and without enforcement mechanisms to be sure they are adhered to, we may not be getting the deal that we expect.

My decisions on public financial support or property tax abatement to private enterprises will be based on a cost-benefit analysis with a social and racial equity lens. Unless the city as a whole, and not just a few people, will benefit from these projects, I see no reason for our public dollars to support them.

12. Under what circumstances would you vote to raise bus fares? Is the city's public transportation system being managed effectively? Is it serving the population which needs it the most? Please comment on your philosophy concerning Durham's public transportation system.

I do not believe that the city should raise bus fares. Our bus system primarily serves low-income people and people of color who do not have access to private transportation. It also serves a critical role with regard to environmental responsibility and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from private vehicles. I support the expansion of public transportation and dedicating significant city resources to making public transit more efficient and affordable.

In general, I believe that our transit system is being managed efficiently and serving the population that needs it most. The only exception to this last point is the route of the fare-free Bull City Connector, which primarily connects Duke University with downtown. I would support expanding the route of this bus further into east Durham or south to NC Central University to more fully serve the communities in these areas with fare-free transportation. In time and with the right priorities, I believe Durham could have a completely fare-free public transportation system like our neighbors in Chapel Hill/Carrboro.

13. The City Council recently voted to approve a “road diet” for Highway 15-501 between University Drive and Chapel Hill Road. Did the council make a wise decision? In general, do you support or oppose reducing vehicular travel lanes to promote traffic-calming, parking, and bicycle and pedestrian travel?

I support the “road diet” for Highway 15-501. Promoting bicycle and pedestrian travel is good for the environment, and providing safer roads will save lives.

14. In general, do you support public funding of city programs and services through property taxes or user fees? Please explain your answer.

City services are public goods that benefit us all and should not be treated like commodities that each individual can choose whether or not to purchase. I believe these should be funded through property taxes, which are a progressive method of allocating cost to each resident. User fees should be reserved only for services that do not advance the well-being of city residents as a whole and rather provide convenience for individuals. As noted above, I would support a reexamination of current city fees to investigate which may have the most regressive impact on our residents, with an eye towards reducing or eliminating the most regressive of these fees.

Law Enforcement

15. Is there a trust problem between the people of Durham and the police department? Are you satisfied with the department’s responses to issues of use of force, racial profiling, searches, and communication with the public?

In any interaction between law enforcement and the public, there is inherently an imbalance of power. Law enforcement agents are authorized to carry deadly weapons and use force against civilians, and as such are wielding a powerful authority over us. I believe that any trust issues between residents and police result from this fundamental structural inequality.

The Durham police department has taken several steps in recent years to address problems with racial profiling, following recommendations made by community groups such as the Human Rights Commission and the FADE Coalition. These efforts have brought issues of biased policing to the forefront, and the department has committed to addressing these issues. Officers are attending training on implicit bias, a written consent for searches policy has been implemented, and better statistics are being kept with regard to searches and traffic stops.

I am concerned, however, with recent statistics that show that black people, especially black men, are still being stopped and searched in Durham at much higher rates than white people. I am also concerned that while consent searches have gone down since the department implemented a written consent for search policy, “probable cause” searches have gone up, indicating that officers are bypassing consent altogether and finding probable cause where perhaps none exists. The city council needs to continue close oversight of the police department with regard to this policy and seek input from community members who have direct experience with the effects of this policy change.

16. Is the Civilian Police Review Board an effective tool for police oversight? If you perceive problems with oversight of the police department, what should be done to correct them?

It is important that police officers are accountable to the community and that truly independent oversight of their actions is taking place. The primary problem with Durham’s Civilian Police Review Board is that it has no enforcement capacity. The Board can make recommendations, but there is no way to ensure that they are ever followed. There is also no public information available about the specific outcomes of cases in regard to disciplinary action taken against officers who are found to have broken the law or departmental policy.

We can correct this by giving the review board direct oversight and enforcement powers over the police department and the departmental budget.

17. Should the enforcement of laws criminalizing marijuana use be among the police department’s lowest priorities?

Yes, I believe that marijuana laws should be a lowest-level law enforcement priority in Durham. I also support the decriminalization of marijuana entirely. Drug laws are often used to unfairly target people of color and the poor. The “war on drugs” has led to an epidemic of mass incarceration that has destroyed families and communities and has not reduced the number of people who experience harm from drug use. I believe drug policy should focus on treatment and support, not criminalization.

Civil Rights

18. Would 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?

Yes, I unconditionally support full equality for LGBT people. I am currently on the adult board of iNSIDE oUT, an organization that supports LGBTQ youth in the Triangle area, and I was active in the fight against Amendment One.

Personal and Political

19. Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offence other than a minor traffic offense? Have you ever been charged with a felony (without regard to the disposition of the charge)? If the answer to either of these questions is yes, please describe the charge or charges, the circumstances, and the outcome.

No.

20. Is there currently a judgment of debt outstanding against you? If so, please explain the circumstances.

No.

21. How are you currently registered to vote? Have you ever changed your registration with regard to party status? If so, when, and why?

Yes, I am registered to vote. No, I have never changed my party status.

22. For whom did you vote for in the 2008 and 2012 presidential and gubernatorial elections? For whom did you vote in the 2014 U. S. Senate election?

I voted for the most progressive candidate in each of these elections. When no sufficiently progressive candidate was available, I chose not to vote in that race.