

PA-PAC Questionnaire for Mayor and City Council Candidates - 2015

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. Please do not use colors.

Please return completed form along with your resume describing education, work history, community service, and prior political experience as soon as possible, but by July 30, 2015, 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 Durham PA-PAC c/o Tom Miller 1110 Virginia Avenue, Durham, NC 27705-3262

Please note that following the July 30 deadline, the Durham People's Alliance PAC may publish your responses to this questionnaire and your resume.

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

Candidate's name: **WILLIAM V. "BILL" BELL**

Office for which you have filled for election (circle one): **Mayor** / At-large City Council

Address: **1003 HUNTSMAN DRIVE DURHAM, NC 27713-2384**

E-mail Address: **WBELL51126@AOL.COM; BILLBELL@UDICDC.ORG; BILL.BELL@DURHAMNC.GOV**

Phone: **919-475-3368 CELL; 919-544-5597 HOME; 919-864-7026 OFFICE; 919-560-4333 OFFICE OF H MAYOR**

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?

Answer: At this point in my life as an elected official, of all the issues confronting city government, the single most important issue to me, encompasses the revitalization of our inner city neighborhoods that have been distressed for long periods of time, reducing poverty and providing affordable housing for below median income residents. I continue to strongly believe that **"Strong Neighborhoods throughout the city makes for a Strong City"**. Strong neighborhoods, in my opinion, are neighborhoods where there is a good quality of life for its residents, free from crime, great housing stock, and all of the other amenities that make a neighborhood attractive to live in. If re-elected as Mayor, I would continue my advocacy for those issues.

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.

Answer: The greatest employment needs of Durham’s residents are employment which pays, at least, livable wage for those residents who need and want employment. The city can continue to use its authority and its resources, such as workforce development, job training, NCWorks Career Center of Durham. The city can continue to provide financial assistance, where fiscally possible, to those businesses that in turn will provide jobs to Durham residents.

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?

Answer: Statutorily the city is limited in what it can do to reduce growing income inequality in our community. However we can continue to work to attract jobs which will help in reducing income inequality. Additionally the Durham City Council has a **“Liveable Wage Ordinance”**. The intent of the **“Liveable Wage Ordinance”** is that the employees of the city contractor and its contractors’ subcontractors shall receive at least the minimum hourly wage paid to City employees. The ordinance applies to contracts designated by the city manager as subject to the ordinance. The ordinance provides for city manager to direct that the Purchasing Division act in his/her behalf in determining whether the ordinance applies.

The city council periodically reviews all positions in its work force to see if its wages for those positions are comparable and competitive within its workforce area. For those positions where wages need to be adjusted we make the adjustments.

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?

Answer: A short and brief response is that I have an interest in, and commitment to, public amenities such as playing fields, open space, and walking and biking trails. I supported a ½ cent increase in property taxes to provide for and maintain these amenities, to the extent that the additional revenue generated by the ½ cent property tax will allow.

I have suggested that the administration take a broader study of what is needed in this area and to report back to the city council its results and recommendations. I am of the opinion that a bond referendum approved by the voters is the best way to financially address these issues, which I hope will be presented to the voters sometime within the next two (2) years.

Housing, City Planning, and Neighborhoods

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

Answer: Gentrification for me is the proactive designed act of transforming communities, whether they are residential or commercial, such that the resulting rents and selling prices are so high that persons

who may have previously lived or had businesses in the community cannot afford to return to the transformed community, because they cannot afford the cost.

I am not sure where in Durham gentrification is happening, to any large extent, according to my definition of gentrification. I know there are sections of Durham where vacant properties have been revitalized, such that the rents or selling prices are at market rates or above market rate levels, but I don't consider that to be gentrification.

If private developers are using private funds and following zoning and building regulations, I am not sure that there is much if anything the city can legally do to prevent a property from being transformed or to regulate the rents or selling prices. If city funds or incentives are supporting the project then the city has more leverage in helping to dictate rents and/or selling prices. This is being done in the Lofts at Southside (formerly Rolling Hills) and Southside home ownership developments that are being revitalized with some support of city funding and mixed income residents are residing in those developments.

5. 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?

Answers: Decisions by the city council on rezoning and designation of neighborhoods to compact neighborhood tiers are generally decided at public hearings. It has been my practice that I do not make a decision on public hearing matters until the public hearing and I have had an opportunity to hear the pros and cons. In general compact neighborhoods are planned along transit stops and with the planning of the Durham-Orange Light Rail System; compact neighborhoods will be a consideration. Each issue is different and unique and I reserve the right to make those decisions after having gone through the public hearing process.

6. 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.

Answer: As mayor I voted to support the Resolution. I cannot say at this time if I would support a change to the resolution without first seeing the proposed change and the reason for the change. The administration is presently studying affordable housing concept and what guidelines should be considered in the development of affordable housing throughout the city as well as what tools or incentives should be developed for developers to incite them to develop affordable housing. I am hopeful that we will have that study and guidelines completed in time to help us on making decisions relative to how we can assure that affordable housing is developed near transit areas.

7. 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?

Answer: In general all of the US Census Tracts within the city limits where there are high levels of poverty need special attention from city government.

The problems are all of the issues (i.e. health, education, housing, public safety, jobs, finance etc.) that may be associated with poverty.

The City Council in conjunction with the County Commissioners, DPS and a broad coalition of individuals, and organizations are taking action in its **"Reducing Poverty Neighborhood by Neighborhood Year by Year Starting in 2014"** in an attempt to help alleviate some of these problems.

8. 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.

Answer: I cannot answer this question without knowing the specific piece of property and the advice of our city attorney as to its legal implications and the liability of down zoning, which the city may or may not assume as a result of such actions.

City Finances, Capital Improvements, Transportation, and City Services

9. 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?

Answer: My top four (4) priorities were 1. Sidewalks; 2. Central Parking Garage; 3. Downtown Parking Garage; 4. SASI. There is nothing that I would include that is not already on the manager's list, considering the fact that much that was on the list was based on previous community and city council inputs. I would have to look at the administration's proposal for financing the projects before deciding if I would raise taxes to construct the projects.

10. 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?

Answer: I voted to support those developments. My philosophy on providing public financial support to private development is to continue to make such decisions as to whether to provide financial support on a project by project basis, taking into consideration the overall cost benefits to the city and what will be the resulting improvements to our quality of life as a city.

11. 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.

Answer: As mayor I have made the decision on raising bus fares based on the information provided. For example I voted not to raise bus fares in last year's budget but opted to subsidize the needed expense to continue the operation. As you may know DATA is now managed by GoTriangle (TTA), but the city council still has the final say on bus fares. Yes I am of the opinion that the system is being managed effectively, and there is always room for improvements. It is serving the population that needs it the most. My philosophy for Durham's public transportation system is that it is a public resource that is needed and must be maintained. It provides a public service for a segment of our population that without DATA would not be able to effectively and efficiently negotiate their important transportation needs.

Answers: Decisions by the city council on rezoning and designation of neighborhoods on compact neighborhood tiers are generally decided at public hearings. It has been my practice that I do not make a decision on public hearing matters until the public hearing and I have had an opportunity to hear the pros and cons. Each issue is different and unique and I reserve the right to make those decisions after having gone through the public hearing process. In general compact neighborhoods are planned along transit stops and with the planning of the Durham-Orange Light Rail System; compact neighborhoods will be a consideration.

12. 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?

Answer: I voted with reservations to approve the "road diet" for Highway 15-501 between University Drive and Chapel Hill Road. In general I support on a case by case basis reducing vehicular travel lane to promote traffic-calming, parking, and bicycle and pedestrian travel. I also in general support complete street concepts.

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

Answer: Yes in general I support public funding of city programs and services through property taxes and or user fees if it provides a service that contributes to the improvement of the quality of life of our city.

Law Enforcement

14. 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?

Answer: I can't speak for all of the people of Durham or the police department on the issue of a trust problem. The issue of a problem of trust between the people of Durham and the police department depends on the answers of individual responses, which I am sure varies depending on who you ask. However Police Community Relations has been the topic of much discussion in our city and continues. I requested that our Human Relations Commission study issues and concerns that were brought to the

City Council concerning police and community relations, following issues that had been raised at several community demonstrations and public comments by citizens at appearances before the city council.

The Human Relations Commission spent almost ten (10) months studying the issues. Their conclusion resulted in several recommendations to the city council. Several of their recommendations have been or are in the act of being implemented (e.g. written consent to search vehicles, use of body cameras by patrol police).

Additionally, I requested that the US Department of Justice (USDOJ) come into our city to look at Police Community Relations and to make recommendations based on their observations. The USDOJ completed their observations after about 8 months of study and made their recommendations to the city council and police department, both of which accepted the recommendations. The USDOJ is now actively working to provide the resources to implement the recommendations.

I know that both the police department and city manager are aware of the seriousness of the concerns that have been raised and will be working to find resolutions.

15. 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?

Answer: The Civilian Police Review Board is not designed as a tool to provide oversight of the police department. The Civilian Police Review Board is a group of Durham residents who are appointed by the Durham City Manager with the approval and confirmation by the Durham City Council to hear appeals of complaints submitted by residents concerning actions taken by Durham Police Officers.

The oversight of the police department, by the city charter, is the responsibility of the Durham City Manager who in turn reports to the Durham City Council.

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

Answer: I have been leading a committee over the last six (6) months or more, looking at this issue and we should have specific recommendations that address some of this issue, sometime in September 2015. As a city the police are limited by the NC General Assembly Statutes as to how much they can do or not do with respect to enforcing laws criminalizing marijuana use. Personally, I am of the opinion that it has to be addressed at the state and federal level, which will allow law enforcement more flexibility in addressing this issue.

Civil Rights

17. 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?

Answer: Yes.

Personal and Political

18. 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.

Answer: No.

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

Answer: 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?

Answer: I am a life-long registered Democrat.

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?

Answer: I voted for the Democratic Candidates for President, Governor and Senator.