

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: Charlie Reece

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

Address: 3604 Darwin Road, Durham, NC 27707

E-mail Address: charlie@charliefordurham.com

Phone: (919) 599-1357

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?

Durham must continue to be a city where you can live and work and raise a family no matter how much money you make or what part of Durham you call home. This is an essential part of Durham's unique character, and this was one of the main reasons my wife Laura and I chose to move to Durham eight years ago. The recent surge in economic development in Durham (especially downtown) is great for a lot of folks, but we need to manage that development carefully to preserve what is so special about Durham. We have to ensure that Durham continues to be affordable for working families, and that the boom in downtown development results in a broadly share prosperity that benefits everyone in Durham.

From a policy perspective, this means first and foremost that Durham must redouble its efforts to keep housing affordable. I applaud the passion displayed by Mayor Bell in connection with the most recent proposed luxury condo project in the Durham Central Park area. While I think there are probably better ways to spend city money to promote the development of affordable housing in and around downtown than buying 4 luxury units at \$200,000 per unit, Mayor Bell's insistence that the development be contingent on adding more affordable housing in Durham is the right kind of philosophy for Durham.

We should also make sure that the benefits that flow from this new economic development result in a broadly shared prosperity for all of Durham. This means that the city should review all public investments – from the parks and recreation budget to the capital improvement plan to the plans for new public transit investments – to ensure that every part of Durham is enjoying the benefits of Durham's current economic boom.

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.

Durham has done a great job in recent years in attracting more high skill, high wage jobs to our city, and certainly those sorts of new jobs add to our tax base and enrich our city greatly. But Durham's most urgent employment needs will not be met by attracting yet more jobs that require advanced degrees and many years of technical experience.

We need a more balanced approach that will attract a broader range of jobs to Durham, including more retail and service sector jobs for entry-level applicants. That's one of the reasons that mixed use developments combining retail, office and residential are so important. At the same time, Durham should expand its efforts to provide job training and certifications to Durham residents in high-demand fields. The Durham Office of Economic Workforce Development has an outstanding partnership with Durham Tech and the NCWorks system that provides short-term training for Durham residents for in-demand jobs. That partnership only costs each participant \$20, and at the end of the training the participants earn certifications that will help them get jobs in high-demand fields right here in Durham. We need to do more to expand the availability of this type of training, and to publicize these opportunities more broadly throughout Durham, so that more of Durham's jobless residents can get these certifications and find good jobs.

We also need to preserve the affordability and accessibility of our public transit system, which is critically important to helping so many Durham residents get to work.

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?

Income inequality is a serious problem in Durham. The richest 5% of Durham's residents earn 27 times the income of the poorest one-fifth of Durham residents. That is simply unacceptable.

Durham needs a broader economic development plan that includes more opportunities for Durham residents to make the transition from low-wage, entry-level positions to jobs that actually pay a living wage. Boosting the availability and visibility of Durham's existing job training programs can help with that, but we also need to make sure that our economic development plans include incentives to bring a broader mix of jobs to Durham.

We can also do much more to praise and highlight Durham businesses that already pay their employees a living wage, especially those employers who have been certified by the Durham Living Wage Project. My wife Laura and I are proud that our family business (which employs nearly 400 people right here in Durham) was one of the inaugural employers in this program. Shining a brighter spotlight on those businesses which pay a living wage can encourage Durham residents to patronize such businesses, and it can also encourage other businesses to step up and pay their employees a living wage.

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?

Durham Parks and Recreation is one of the best things about the city of Durham. Durham's public parks, playing fields, trails and recreation programs are critical to making Durham an actual community – they bring the people of Durham together in the spirit of recreation and in the enjoyment of nature and open spaces.

I was a supporter of the proposal last year to earmark up to a penny of the city's property tax rate for maintenance of our parks and trails. I'm proud of the hard work that's been done by DPR to make good use of the ½ cent earmark that was ultimately approved last year by the Durham City Council (especially some of the new lighting, repaving, and re-seeding to combat erosion). I'd like to work with DPR to take a look at the remaining projects on their maintenance list to see if ½ cent is sufficient to continue making this kind of progress.

Housing, City Planning, and Neighborhoods

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

I dislike the term "gentrification" because it can mean such different things to different people. But I am deeply concerned by an acceleration in the rise of housing costs in many of Durham's historic neighborhoods, especially in the West End and Burch Avenue neighborhoods (among many others). That acceleration is partly due to the rapid pace of new economic development downtown, and partly due to the fact that we're not doing enough to spur the creation of new affordable housing units in these areas.

Creating new affordable housing in Durham won't be easy, and the proposed Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project presents opportunities and challenges in this area. Increased development around the proposed transit stations will increase upward pressure

on property values in those areas, but it will also create opportunities for developers to make use of the existing “density bonus” to create new affordable housing units. The way the bonus works may need to be tweaked, but it would allow developers to add market-priced units in return for adding affordable units in those developments.

The Durham City Council can also be more aggressive in requiring developers to contribute directly to efforts to develop more affordable housing in Durham. This can be accomplished in a number of different ways, including the allocation of a certain number of units in a residential project as affordable units, or the payment of fees by the developer for the development of affordable units elsewhere in lieu of such allocations.

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?

The current effort by the planning department is in part in response to the increasing certainty of the station locations of the proposed Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project. The new compact neighborhood tiers are intended to permit and encourage the sort of density of development uses suitable for the areas surrounding the proposed station locations. I support the creation of density and increased walkability around these stations, but the zoning changes that allow this must be made in close concert with the impacted communities. It is critical that city planners ensure community members are directly involved in these conversations. I know the planning department has conducted at least one round of community meetings concerning the creation of new compact neighborhood tiers near the proposed light rail stations, but there is a lot more work to be done to get neighborhood-level buy in for the sorts of zoning changes coming to these areas. These changes must be guided by a respect for the preferences of the people already living in these communities while still achieving the goals of increased density and walkability around these proposed stations. That’s a tall order, but I believe our planning staff is up to the challenge.

With respect to the proposed conversion of compact neighborhood tiers into design districts, Durham must be cautious. The experience of the design district at Ninth Street shows us that a broader use of this zoning designation would result in taller residential construction with much less architectural variety. That is not necessarily in the best interests of every neighborhood in Durham. Moreover, this is the sort of zoning change which also requires deep community involvement in order to be successful.

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 wholeheartedly support the resolution. The creation of these light rails stations will inevitably create additional upward pressure on property values in those areas, and the city’s commitment to reaching the goals set forth in the resolution is critically important

to maintaining the affordability of those neighborhoods. To the extent possible under existing law, the city should use the zoning process (and every other process at its disposal, including the granting of easements and the sale of city-owned property) to encourage, cajole and demand that developers include affordable units in new residential developments near the proposed light rail stations.

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?

North East Central Durham is an historic community in Durham with a proud heritage. But that community now desperately needs new economic development and a better law enforcement approach to tackle crime. Durham should focus additional resources to encourage economic development in and around North East Central Durham – if we can spend \$11.25 million to create new office space downtown, we can create a package of incentives that would be attractive to developers for NECD as well. And we need a new focus from the Durham Police Department on preventing and investigating violent crime that makes misdemeanor marijuana crimes the lowest level enforcement priority of the DPD and encourages officers to engage with community members directly by driving less and walking more.

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.

Downzoning would only win my support where a zoned use either was particularly out of character for its surrounding area or would have considerable negative consequences for the specific neighborhood involved. Even then, there are constitutional issues surrounding the practice of downzoning that have to be considered, so using that particular tool would require in-depth consultation with the city attorney.

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 would choose the following four projects:

1. Station Area Strategic Infrastructure (SASI)
2. Sidewalk Projects (Durham Walks!)
3. Fayetteville Road Widening
4. Recreation Center

If necessary, I would support an increase in the property tax rate to complete these projects.

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 would have sent both of these proposals back to the drawing board. It is not entirely clear to me that, but for the guarantee of \$11.25 million in public money, these projects would have evaporated. Far from it – downtown Durham is a place where everyone wants to be right now. I understand full well that this is how this game is played by local governments across North Carolina and the country as a whole. And I know that local governments are under considerable pressure to bring in new developments such as these. But these incentive payments amount to 70% of the future tax revenues generated from these projects over the next 15 years. That is simply too high a price to pay, especially at a time when businesses and developers are clamoring to get into downtown Durham. We need new office space downtown, there's no question about that. But I believe these were bad deals for the city.

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 cannot envision any scenario under which I would vote to raise bus fares in Durham. My philosophy about Durham's public transportation system is simple: our public transit system is an essential lifeline for working families in Durham, and if anything we should explore ways to reduce bus fares. Recent surveys indicate that ridership is generally satisfied with the level of service provided by GoDurham, and on that basis I believe that the system is being managed effectively and is serving the population that needs it the most. But we desperately need more bus shelters and sidewalks in order to improve the customer experience for those who use public transit.

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 Durham City Council's decision to approve the road diet on Highway 15-501. The crash rate in that stretch of the Boulevard is nearly 250% of the national average for similar roadways, and traffic speeds are generally well in excess of the posted speed limit of 35 miles per hour. The road diet should have the effect of reducing speeds and improving safety. We should look for other high-risk stretches of road in Durham where these sorts of traffic-calming measures can help make our community safer.

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

Property taxes are the fairest, most equitable, most progressive way in which to support funding for city programs. User fees can often be regressive, and as such I would tend to favor replacing user fees with small incremental adjustments to the property tax rate.

Durham PA had success last year in convincing the Durham City Council to repeal the regressive solid waste fee in favor of a tiny increment in the property tax, and I am proud to have played a small part in PA's advocacy before the city council on that issue.

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?

The recent report from the US Department of Justice confirmed that a wide gulf continues to separate the people of Durham and our police department. There is no question that Durham Police Department continues to struggle with the problem of public trust. The racial disparities in consent searches during DPD traffic stops that were identified by the FADE Coalition last year only added to a growing sense of concern by the people of Durham that the DPD is headed in the wrong direction. Last summer's successful fight to institute reforms of the DPD was a great moment for our community, and I was proud to lead the Durham PA's work in that area, but there is so much more to be done. Statistical evidence of the trend in vehicle searches since the institution of the written consent requirement strongly suggest a "substitution effect" occurred, with probable cause searches by the DPD largely replacing the consent searches. This is very troubling and bears additional analysis of the data. We must also make marijuana enforcement the lowest level enforcement priority of the Durham Police Department.

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?

The Civilian Police Review Board (CPRB) can be an effective tool for police oversight, but the CPRB needs active members who will provide the active oversight into claims of police misconduct that our system needs. Recent trends at the CPRB suggest that there is a new openness to reviewing appeals from DPD investigations of complaints against officers – for the first time in years, the CPRB has scheduled hearings into a number of these appeals.

However, the attorney who staffs the CPRB and advises them in their work is also the member of the City Attorney's legal staff who represents DPD officers who are accused of civil rights violations in federal court. This is a clear conflict of interest and must be rectified if the CPRB is to have credibility in the community.

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

At a time when violent crime is on the rise in Durham, we cannot afford the Durham Police Department's seeming obsession with low level marijuana offenses. As a former prosecutor, I've seen how the large numbers of these marijuana charges impact the criminal justice system. Walk into any district courtroom in Durham on any day of the week and you will see dockets clogged with misdemeanor marijuana-related offenses –

and courtrooms filled with defendants facing those misdemeanor charges who are primarily young, primarily men, and primarily African American. Those misdemeanor marijuana convictions act as “scarlet letters” for these young people, often preventing them from getting jobs later in life. And when national studies show us that whites and African Americans use drugs at the same rates, the continued focus on these types of low-level marijuana offenses in African American neighborhoods is difficult to defend.

We need a new approach in Durham. The DPD must begin to treat these low-level marijuana offenses as their lowest enforcement priority. Then we can reallocate these valuable law enforcement resources into the investigation and prevention of violent crimes. That’s how we can make Durham’s criminal justice system fairer while making Durham safer from violent crime.

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?

Absolutely. My wife Laura and I opposed Amendment 1, and our family business has offered domestic partner benefits to our gay and lesbian employees for many years. No one should face discrimination in any form due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

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.

I have never been charged or convicted of any crime or traffic offense.

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

I do not have any judgments outstanding against me.

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

I am a registered Democrat, and I have always been a 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?

In 2008, I voted for Barack Obama and Beverly Perdue. In 2012, I voted for Barack Obama and Walter Dalton. In 2012, I voted for Kay Hagan.