

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: James Lyons

Office for which you have filled for election (circle one): **Mayor** / 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? The single issue that is most important to me is Public Safety and crime. The reason this issue is most important to me is because our community's public safety and crime is vital to every aspect of our community. It can be the deciding factor whether or not a new business wants to move to our city and create jobs. Public safety and crime also plays a role in the decision making of new residents wanting to relocate to our city or have their children in our school system. Public safety and crime creates a domino effect for everything else.

What would you do about it if elected?

If elected I would make public safety and crime my top priority. I would seek guidance from other cities that had to overcome the same challenges that our city face. I would find out from these cities what worked and what did not work. I would take a proactive approach in dealing with our cities crime.

2. What are the greatest employment needs of Durham's residents?

The greatest employment needs of Durham's residents are higher wages and more job opportunities. Durham residents also are in need of more work programs for ex-felons that has paid their debt to society.

How can city government use its authority and its resources to direct jobs to those who most need them?

City government can use its authority and resources to direct jobs to those who most need them by offering perks and incentives to employers that employ those in the community that are in need of employment.

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?

The City Council could act in an effort to offer more access and training for more skilled labor higher paying jobs. In an effort to reduce the income inequalities in our communities our city government can look at perhaps rewarding businesses that offer increased wages to its employees. Again, quality affordable housing is another great opportunity that can be used to help close the income gap.

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 have a significant level of interest in our city's public amenities. I am an avid bike rider, therefore, making sure our walking and biking trails are well kept and preserved is dear to my heart. Before I would allow our city's amenities to deteriorate, I would really take a close look at every option we had at our disposal prior to raising property taxes.

Housing, City Planning, and Neighborhoods

5. What does "gentrification" mean to you?

I define gentrification as the purchasing and development of urban neighborhoods by wealthier developers with the sole purpose of increasing the value of the purchased property and the properties surrounding the purchased property. As a result of the purchased property, low income citizens and families are subsequently displaced.

Where is it happening?

I see gentrification happening in our downtown area.

What, if anything, should be done about it?

I feel our city government should have some real conversations and look for real solutions to quality affordable housing and rent in the near future.

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 am presently researching this initiative.

7. In 2014, the city council adopted a resolution calling for affordable housing near planned transit stations. Do you support the resolution?

Yes

Would you change it?

I would not change it without knowing the pros and cons of having affordable housing and not having affordable housing near planned transit stations and the impact it would have on our communities. Should the city grant developer requests for rezonings near transit areas without commitments for affordable housing?

No

Please explain your answers.

I believe the city grant developer must use every tool at its disposal to gain commitments for affordable housing.

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?

Our city has lots of geographic areas that require special attention. Some of these areas require affordable housing/rent. Our city government should work extremely hard to find workable resolutions to these problems.

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.

Before I would vote to downzone a piece of property I would want to learn the pros and cons of downzoning the property.

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 presently waiting on detailed information in regards to the four capital improvements.

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?

It’s too early to know if the \$11.25million in public funding was the correct decision. We have to see what impact it has on the city’s economy and the downtown area and businesses overall.

Are the projects equally deserving?

It’s too early to know if the projects are equally deserving.

As a council member, what philosophy will guide you in deciding whether to provide public financial support to private development enterprises?

As a council member the philosophy I would use to decide whether to provide public financial support to private development enterprises would be the projected financial impact it would provide to our local economy, the number of jobs the projects would bring to our community as well as various other deciding factors.

12. Under what circumstances would you vote to raise bus fares?

Being that a significant number of our city’s bus users are low income or unemployed, I would have to take in to consideration our city’s unemployment, cost of living, and minimum wage pay.

Is the city’s public transportation system being managed effectively?

Yes

Is it serving the population which needs it the most?

Yes

Please comment on your philosophy concerning Durham's public transportation system.

As with anything, there is always room for improvement. I've personally used our public transportation system throughout my campaign, and I must say it serves our city well. Citizens in the community that use our public transportation on a daily basis had good things to say about our public transportation system. There were a few users that had issues with certain parts of the city not being adequately serviced.

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?

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

No . . . not in general.

Please explain your answer.

As a rule of thumb I do not support public funding of city programs and services through taxes or user fees.

Law Enforcement

15. Is there a trust problem between the people of Durham and the police department?

Yes

Are you satisfied with the department's responses to issues of use of force, racial profiling, searches, and communication with the public?

n/a – waiting on DPD statistical reports

16. Is the Civilian Police Review Board an effective tool for police oversight?

Yes

If you perceive problems with oversight of the police department, what should be done to correct them?

More transparency

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

It should not be among the lowest or the highest.

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

Personal and Political

19. Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offence other than a minor traffic offense?

No

Have you ever been charged with a felony (without regard to the disposition of the charge)?

No

If the answer to either of these questions is yes, please describe the charge or charges, the circumstances, and the outcome.

20. Is there currently a judgment of debt outstanding against you?

No

If so, please explain the circumstances.

21. How are you currently registered to vote?

Democrat

Have you ever changed your registration with regard to party status?

Yes

If so, when, and why?

2015 when I ran entered Mayoral race

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 president Obama.