

tPA PAC Questionnaire for Durham City Council Ward Seats and Durham Mayor – 2021

Please return the completed form along with your resume or biographical statement describing education, work history, community service, and prior political experience as soon as possible, but by Friday August 20 at 5pm, at the latest.

Please e-mail your responses to the PAC Board at papacboard@googlegroups.com by August 20 at 5pm.

Please note that following the Friday August 20 at 5pm deadline, the People's Alliance PAC may publish your responses to this questionnaire and your resume.

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. Do not use colors or shading.

Please try to confine your responses to no more than 300 words unless another word limit is indicated. Do not feel obliged to exhaust the limit for each question.

If you use words or ideas from another person, please attribute your source.

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

Candidate's name: ___ Marion T. Johnson _____

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Question from Rochelle.

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 were elected?
 - a. Durham, like most cities, is facing an economic crisis in the wake of COVID-19. We have weathered an \$8 million loss in revenue since the beginning of the pandemic. We're also in a pre-emption-friendly state that prevents the kind of aggressive tax policy that we really need to counteract the decade-plus of regressive tax policies from the state and federal level. However, Durham still has the potential and ability to make strong progressive budgets that prioritize things like a thriving wage of \$25/hour for municipal employees and contractors; affordable medium-high and high-density housing, as well as rental assistance; free public transit; and prioritizing infrastructure maintenance and repair in low-

income neighborhoods. Using federal recovery funds is another tool we have available to us to avoid leaning on regressive budget and tax solutions to fill the hole in our city budget.

- b. COVID-19 also exacerbated Durham's housing crisis. We already had a housing shortage, particularly in affordable housing; and were battling rapid gentrification and displacement, especially of Black families. COVID-19 accelerated the eviction rate, the rate at which people become homeless, and the widening wealth gap between homeowners and renters. The people who are most vulnerable are people who have unstable or unofficial housing agreements, or are renting month-to-month, because they often don't qualify for typical tenant protections.
- c. We need to expand legal protections for renters, and require that developers agree to eviction protections for new housing developments. The city-county effort that created the Durham Emergency Rental Assistance Program is a great example of how leadership can leverage multiple levels of support - city, county, and federal - to best serve and protect residents.

Education

- 2. Do you think it's appropriate to use the city's zoning/annexation/utility extension powers to hold charter schools accountable? If so, how would you do that?
 - a. I do not believe Durham needs more charter schools. In a best case scenario, charter schools provide families with the option of more individualized and more accommodating school environments. Unfortunately, in North Carolina charter schools have largely been used to divert funding from public schools that need it, effectively stranding low-income, Black, and brown students in under-funded and unsupportive environments. If charter schools weren't reliably re-segregating our school system, I would feel differently about them. As it is, I support more funding for our public schools before increasing the number of charter schools in Durham. City council could charter schools to apply for specific zoning approval. That approval could then be contingent on the schools' ability to show how they are advancing and centering equity, and not reinforcing segregation and the associated racial harm that comes with it.
- 3. How will you ensure that school facilities are incorporated into the long-range comprehensive planning process so that schools will serve as focal points for communities and neighborhoods?
 - a. As our city grows, our needs for high quality public education and

infrastructure grows as well. The DPS student population grows exponentially every year, and we need an infrastructure that can grow with it while providing high quality education. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the obstacles many of our children face in trying to get an education, including housing and food insecurity and a lack of broadband access. School readiness to support students and their families through a crisis like COVID-19 is also an issue. Any measures that city council, the school board, or the state considers have to prioritize the most vulnerable students in our systems. This includes students in low-income families, students who are English learners or whose parents don't speak English, students who are undocumented, and students with disabilities. Using stimulus funds from the CARES Act specifically to target these students and their families would be my biggest priority here.

- b.
- 4. How should the City Council use public dollars to ensure that youth in Durham have equitable access, including transportation, to affordable extracurricular and job training opportunities?
 - a. The Durham Youth Listening Project Report has some incredible youth-centered and youth-driven ideas that the city is already taking advantage of. Programs like the 2021 Durham Youth Leadership Fund and the updated Changed By Youth Ambassador Program need continued funding and support from the city. YouthWorks is also an excellent opportunity that connects youth and young adults to training and internship, with the goal of connecting them to employment pipelines. I would commit to targeting that program as much as possible to Black and brown youth, who are the least likely to have the networks that tend to yield strong job opportunities.
 - b. COVID-19 has really highlighted the need for technological support for remote trainings, internships, and work environments in general. Providing things like laptops and support for broadband access will be critical to ensuring that there are as few barriers to entry as possible. Similarly, our transportation infrastructure is simply not as accessible as it should be. Durham youth - and the Durham population at large - need

more safe and reliable options to get around the city that don't depend on having a car. Increased and more frequent bus services, dedicated and consistent bike lanes, and consistent and safe sidewalks are all part of making our transportation infrastructure reliable and accessible.

5. What ideas do you have for Parks and Recreation to improve specialized programming options for different populations? (For example, disabled or religiously adherent members of our communities.)
 - a. I'll admit that I'm not as familiar with Parks and Recreation's current programming options, but I'm excited to learn. I look forward to hearing from community members about what their needs and ideas are, and amplifying those ideas so they get the support and resources that they need.

Racial Equity

6. How does race equity play into your view of governance? Will you ensure that race equity is a part of your leadership/governance? If so, how?
 - a. Equity has to be intersectional, because all of us have numerous identities and belong to numerous communities that affect how we're able to move through the world. My Blackness affects and is affected by my queerness. My femme cisgender identity affects and is affected by my disability. We can't pull out one of these identities to the exclusion of others and call that equity, because that simply reinforces exclusion, harm, and inequity. Equity is a constantly emergent aspiration that requires us to keep centering marginalized voices, keep repairing harm, and keep striving for our shared liberation.
 - b. A large part of my current job at Frontline Solutions, a Black-owned social justice consulting firm, is helping organizations create work environments that are equitable and affirming. None of our systems, structures, or institutions are built for equity. They're all designed to protect and reinforce capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Creating equitable and affirming environments requires dismantling the current status quo, centering marginalized voices, and repairing harm. It also requires recognizing that our liberation is bound together. As a city councilmember I would lead the effort to make city council, and the

community at large, as accessible, affirming, and equitable as possible, so that every member of our community feels heard, supported, and empowered.

7. What is your position on the county/city of Durham establishing a dedicated Race Equity Fund? Please explain.
 - a. I strongly support reparations. It's actually a fundamental part of my podcast, *At The Intersection*--we ask every guest "how do you want your reparations?" And in my campaign platform, I call for the city to establish a fund specifically for reparations. So I strongly support the dedicated Race Equity Fund, and am excited that Durham sees repairing the harm that Black residents have suffered as a priority. However, I don't believe that true reparations are really possible on a city level. In order for reparations that really account for the plunder of wealth, labor, and personhood of Black Americans to happen, the federal government needs to take up the cause. Nothing that Durham does at the city or county level can really touch the debt that this country owes to Black Americans.

8. How, if at all, should Durham utilize the 2020 Durham Racial Equity Taskforce Report?
 - a. The 2020 Racial Equity Task Force Report is a bracing and necessary wake-up call for Durham, and how city government can commit to being truly anti-racist and not just race-neutral. I was especially struck by how clear and direct the language in the report is about the white supremacy and racial trauma that are fundamental to this country and every institution that grows out of it, including city government and public schools. I believe the recommendations in that report, which are comprehensive and wide-ranging, should serve as the foundation of Durham's strategic plan. The recommended racial equity checklist and racial impact tool are particularly exciting to me, because they're in line with the kinds of recommendations we make to our clients at my firm. The word 'checklist' is somewhat misleading, because equity can't be achieved if we think of it as checking a box, but having meaningful questions to ask when we're evaluating whether a program, policy, or other decision is furthering equity is an important way to make equity tangible.

Housing and Transportation

9. How will you ensure that new housing development serves the Durham community equitably, including households with income less than \$15/hour?
 - a. Implementing the affordable housing bond, which combined with local and federal funding gives us \$160 million to work with, will be a phenomenal opportunity to provide new housing, connect people to current housing, and protect long-standing neighborhoods from displacement.
 - b. I think the priority for zoning in Durham right now is to create as much housing as possible, with a particular focus on affordable housing. That means re-zoning city-owned parcels of land as medium-high and high density residential land, so that we can build housing that can accommodate a range of options - not just studios and one-bedrooms - while not contributing to sprawl. We can also use zoning to implement environmental policies, such as requiring new developments to commit to carbon neutrality and green infrastructure, and making land use decisions that protect against the environmental racism that's baked into our city.

10. Would you support adding a city policy to the Comprehensive Plan which favors the inclusion of at least 20% small dwelling units in new residential developments? If such a policy were adopted, under what circumstances would you let it guide your vote on zoning/annexation/utility extension cases? Under what circumstances would you make an exception to such a policy?
 - a. Affordable housing shouldn't accommodate just one type of resident, and it shouldn't look one particular way. Affordable housing is a need across different household structures. We need diverse, green, affordable housing, particularly transit-accessible medium-high and high-density housing that doesn't contribute to sprawl and pollution. Having small dwelling units would meaningfully contribute to that density, so we can take advantage of small or irregularly-shaped plots of land that otherwise go unused or undeveloped. It would also allow us to divide larger lots into smaller parcels, thereby creating more housing options than we previously had. If residents could provide a meaningful argument as to why small dwelling units would be disruptive to their neighborhood, or if the small dwelling units would contribute to a poorer standard of living (due to accessibility issues, for instance) then I believe city council should make an exception to this policy.

(Note: 'Small' in this context would mean smaller than 1,200 sf in single-family units, whether attached or detached, and smaller than 1,000 sf in two bedroom apartments in multifamily buildings.)

11. How will you make the development process transparent to neighborhoods and ensure they have a seat at the table with planning staff and developers? Would you support Durham neighborhoods in creating small area plans?
 - a. Durham is the only city our size in North Carolina that doesn't utilize small area plans, and I think this is a big missed opportunity. Small area plans are a great tool for residents to clarify and defend their own priorities, especially when it comes to housing, neighborhood repair and revitalization, and environmental policies. They would empower city council to approve developments that are in line with the community's standards and boundaries, and not leave historically Black neighborhoods in particular vulnerable to developers who see the land as an opportunity for profit, not a community to be respected. But most importantly, they would empower residents to determine what their neighborhoods and communities can look like.

12. How will you expand bus service, so riders can connect across Durham? What transportation infrastructure is most pressing to fund and expand?
 - a. I'm really committed to making Durham more friendly towards people who aren't driving cars - people who are walking, biking, using wheelchairs, or taking the bus. Making Durham a transit- and pedestrian-friendly city will make us a more accessible city, as well as a more environmentally-conscious one. This can include expanding bike lanes and making them more consistent, implementing dedicated bus lanes on busier thoroughfares, increasing bus routes beyond the city center, co-creating a commuter rail throughout the Triangle, and investing in green transit like GoDurham's two electric buses. I've also been excited to see the success of the Strettery, and am interested in how we could make some downtown streets permanently closed to cars so that we can increase pedestrian traffic and free up some space.

13. Black communities in Durham are being threatened by displacement due to private investment. What resources and support can the City and County deploy to help longtime residents resist the negative impact of these developments and facilitate self-determined visions for the future of each community?

Gentrification, displacement, and unsustainable over-development have created a housing crisis in Durham, especially for Black communities who have lived here for generations. That crisis has only been magnified by COVID-19, since Black people have

been the most likely to lose their jobs and their ability to pay rent or mortgages in this pandemic.

Community land trusts are one extremely helpful tool to protect neighborhoods from the acute displacement that Black neighborhoods are facing. Expanding community land trusts to more historically Black neighborhoods could go a long way towards protecting against displacement. And again, small area plans are an incredibly empowering option for putting neighborhood- and community-level decisions directly in residents' hands.

14. Energy affordability is an underappreciated aspect of housing affordability. What steps can the City take to ensure high electricity bills do not force residents out of their homes?
 - a. Rising energy bills will continue to be a problem as our climate crisis grows. The website showyourstripes.info is an incredible resource that shows heat graphs for regions and countries around the world based on the average temperature for every year. A darker blue stripe is a colder average temperature; the darker red means hotter. Local journalist Kirk Ross created maps for cities and regions within North Carolina, and since 2010, you can see the Triangle (and the rest of the state) getting hotter and hotter. If everyone is cranking up the A/C more days out of the year, those costs will add up, especially for low-income households who already spend a higher share of their income on energy bills. Part of the reason low-income households see such disproportionately high energy spending is that they're often living in older housing that hasn't been upgraded to be energy-efficient. Prioritizing renovation and upgrade funding for older homes, which also typically have dangerous pollutants like lead paint, would be one critical way the city can support these households.
15. How would you act to ensure that development in Durham is done in an equitable way that benefits long-time residents as well as new arrivals?

Development in Durham has been happening in spikes in the city, with overdevelopment largely occurring downtown and a real lack of investment in historically Black neighborhoods in particular. Development and revitalization do not have to result in displacement, but the policy choices Durham has made have done so. We need to prioritize community-grounded development, which means approving development that the relevant communities are asking for and will benefit from. Bringing neighborhood residents into conversations about development, and putting the decisions about what their neighborhoods can and should look like, is the only way to make development and its impact equitable. And to that end I'll reiterate my support for community land trusts and small area plans.

Environment and Climate

16. What do you see as the most critical environmental and climate justice issues facing Durham, and what do you believe the city should do about them? Specifically, what opportunities do you see at the intersection of climate action, environmental justice, and Durham's economic development strategy?
 - a. Environmental justice requires that we prioritize and protect the Black and brown communities who are disproportionately vulnerable to harm, thanks to decades of redlining, segregation, and disinvestment. When we're prioritizing communities who are closest to harm, that also creates sustainable and healthy Durham. Earmarking funding for green infrastructure in low-income communities, investing in renewable energy and carbon neutrality, and making land use decisions that protect against the sprawl that makes our city less accessible and less sustainable are all important priorities.

17. American city government officials have the unique power of regulating real estate through zoning. Will you accept donations to your campaign from major real estate interests? Please explain your position.
 - a. No, I will not accept donations from major real estate interests. I feel generally squeamish about the amount of money that goes into politics, and I'm honestly taken aback at how much can go into it at the local level. I believe political campaigns should be publicly financed, which would both liberate candidates from the financial influence of lobbyist groups and big money donors, and level the playing field for candidates from more diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

City Finances, Incentive, and Services

18. What is the most important thing that is not currently being funded by the City? Would you be willing to raise taxes to fund this item?
- a. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition's latest report, the housing wage in the Triangle is \$21.81/hour. Advocating for a living wage of \$15/hour isn't sufficient anymore. We need to be advocating for a *thriving* wage of \$25/hour - enough for people to consistently keep their heads above water and not be one missed paycheck away from disaster. That advocacy should include paying Durham City employees \$25/hour.
 - b. If necessary, I would be willing to raise taxes to fund a thriving wage, but I also know that North Carolina preemption laws prevent us from enacting the kind of progressive tax policy that we really need. I believe that a thriving wage would contribute to long-term and widespread economic stability across the city, but I'm still wrestling with how to make this happen in the most equitable way, and a way that doesn't put more burden on low-income residents.
 - c.
19. What is your position on providing public incentives to private firms to promote economic development in Durham?
- a. I'm very leery of public incentives, especially when it amounts to tax breaks for large, multinational firms. Apple coming to RTP is a major example. Headlines touted the \$1 billion investment Apple will be making, but the incentive deals they received are worth \$845.8 million. That trade-off really dampens the impact of Apple's investment. And research shows that incentives don't make as much of an impact on companies' decisions to move somewhere as factors like quality of life, public education, and the strength of existing infrastructure. All factors that would be improved by the money that's instead spent on tax incentives.

Justice and Law Enforcement

20. The newly elected Council will have to decide whether to transfer fifteen frozen positions by the current Council from the Durham Police Department to the newly created Community Safety Department. What is your position regarding the new Department, and would you support the transfer? If the Department's pilot programs are successful,

what other resources would you be willing to commit to it, and where would they come from?

- a. I was proud to sign on to the 10 to Transform campaign, and I absolutely support the transfer of these positions from the DPD to the Community Safety Department. Results from cities that have piloted efforts like the Department of Community Safety and Wellness, including New York City, are extremely encouraging. Dispatching trained and unarmed mental health specialists and paramedics instead of police for certain nonviolent emergency calls has resulted in more people accepting assistance and fewer people sent to the hospital. I believe sending armed police into every situation increases the likelihood of violence, especially against Black people and people with mental health issues, and that violence isn't keeping us safe. I'm committed to reimagining public safety in Durham, and believe that this is a crucial and exciting first step to doing so.
 - b. Coming from a budget and tax background, I know that there's never an easy pocket of funding that can be plucked out of one part of the budget and dropped into another, much as we wish there were. And I also know that taking funding from the police budget is not as straightforward and easy as we would like it to be. The first things a police department would cut are likely the things that many communities are asking for, like for police officers to participate in community meetings or provide security for community events. So I can't in good conscience say right now where additional funds for the Community Safety Department would come from.
21. Are you satisfied with the Durham Police Department, including its administrative, law enforcement, and security functions? Should City government increase or decrease resources allocated to the Police Department? Please explain your answer.
- a. I take gun violence in Durham very seriously. My neighborhood sees a lot of gun violence, and a few years ago a man was shot to death right outside our home. In my conversations with community members and law enforcement officers, I'm more convinced than ever that gun violence and other violent crimes are the ultimate result of numerous systemic failures, and that adding more police does not solve any of those failures. Increasing surveillance with programs like ShotSpotter doesn't do anything to *prevent* gun violence. Alleviating poverty, homelessness, and access to guns does prevent gun violence. We need sustained commitment to economic justice, housing justice, and true community safety--and that commitment will take more than just city council. It must be a county-, state-, and ultimately nation-wide commitment.

- b. It's also important to hold space for different communities' relationships to policing in general. Everyone wants a system that supports, protects, and empowers them. But the current policing system we have doesn't give that to everyone. There are some parts of Durham that feel completely ignored and abandoned by this system. There are others that feel surveilled and criminalized. I'm equally concerned with what we do as a city regarding police as I am with how we do it, making sure that residents feel bought in to and brought along in this process. Otherwise, they have no reason to believe that this process will serve them the way they need it to.

Political

22. For whom did you vote for in the 2016 and 2020 presidential and gubernatorial elections? For whom did you vote in the 2020 U. S. Senate election? *Please limit your answer to the names of your selections.*

- a. 2016: Clinton, Cooper
- b. 2020: Biden, Cooper, Cunningham

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Please do not forget to provide us with your resume or biographical statement.