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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?

For several years I have tried to focus the attention of our public square on the scourge of gun violence confronting our city. By virtue of my seat on the city council I consider myself one of Durham's chief brand ambassadors and totally embrace the narrative of our city's desirability and ascendance. It once was my fear that the narrative of greatness would be eclipsed by a counter narrative of gun violence and youth mortality aided by a lack of aggressive government action. My fear now is steadily becoming that Durham's continued ascendance in spite of rampant gunfire may indicate an acceptance of a two city existence. I believe that it is morally reprehensible that so many of Durham's children have integrated nightly gunfire into their worldview as normal. If reelected I will continue

to advocate for our government to behave as if gunfire is an undeclared state of emergency and bring every tool available to bear on the problem. During my first term in office I successfully called for the municipal funding of an expansion of a county led violence interruption initiative, called for a municipal experiment with Guaranteed Income, brokered a commitment from a technology company to allow Durham to test gun fire detection technology for free, and supported funding of initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of violence such as the We Are The Ones Fund.

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?

There needs to be a clear delineation between accountability and punishment. Accountability implies expectation, and expectation implies inclusion. I am a product of public schools and the son of a NYC public schools special education teacher. I have long been in opposition to charter schools not as a reflexive unexplored ideological article of faith; but rather for very specific reasons

that through the prism of accountability could actually be addressed by policy. Black integration into the American experiment has historically been by definition a litany of trial and error. From communism, to black nationalism, to nonviolent resistance, to our own universities, to charter schools Black people have never had the luxury of not at least “checking something out” to combat the existential absurdity of the American sojourn. So here’s my beef with charter schools - I believe that they drive de facto exclusion and segregation by not providing transportation, free and reduced lunch, EC services, and other things. I would fully support the proposition of the city tethering zoning/annexation/utility extension decisions for charter schools to their willingness to provide everything that makes them in my assessment so objectionable. In fact at one point in my life I had the opportunity to do this as a private citizen. I was challenged precisely because of my opposition to charter schools to help design one that works. By virtue of the fact that my opposition to charter schools was an actual enumerated list of reasons I was invited to address the list. I held that the only way I would participate was if on day one Excelsior Classical Academy provided transportation, free lunch, EC services, and uniform assistance for the economically challenged. No exceptions. No delays. They did it; and those policies persist to this day. This is where the line between accountability and

summary punishment was drawn for me. An accountable charter school has all of these things; those that don't will never have my support. If a charter school crossed this threshold, to deny them an affirmative vote would be departing from accountability and flirting with ideological entrenchment and a reflexively punitive ethic. I don't think this helps Black and Brown children in the long run.

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?

The exercise of developing a long-range comprehensive plan in Durham should and will from now on be done with an intense focus on equity. This by definition means that community members and stakeholders (particularly those that have been historically marginalized) will drive what the "focal points for communities and neighborhoods" will be. With that said, it should not be a tough sell on the incredible value of school facilities in our long term planning. The proliferation of families with school aged children is an organic driver of the centrality of schools. However, making the case for the multiplier

effect schools can have as multi-use facilities beyond instructional hours is critical. Partnering with educational officials to use school facilities for community meetings, cultural celebrations, and activities for youth, will allow us to incorporate schools without violating any firewalls of our governing purview. I was honored to introduce to and secure an affirmative vote from my council colleagues to provide municipal funding for a feasibility study on a Durham Public Schools Central Kitchen. This facility would not only serve DPS constituent schools, but could also be a key component in battling food insecurity in Durham at large.

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?

The City Council quite simply should do all in its power to make and keep riding on Durham buses free while still bolstering service delivery. Additionally, the council should use its financial muscle in the form of economic incentive packages with existing and prospective corporate citizens to establish internships, apprenticeships, and ultimately job opportunities for Durham youth. While these

arrangements may seem unsavory to some they are one of the few ways that governments can contour and influence behavior. Furthermore, the ultimate financial returns to the city inevitably eclipse the initial investment. The first 2 visitors I hosted after moving into my city hall office were educational leaders. Duke University President Vince Price, and Durham Public Schools Superintendent Pascal Mubenga emphasized how vital it was to partner with educational entities notwithstanding our inherent jurisdiction as a council. The bulk of my conversation with Dr. Mubenga was about restoring vocational training in our High Schools and making the case to Durham's impressive list of corporate citizens to commit to a robust employment pipeline for our students.

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.)

Our Parks and Recreation department has the mandate and the real estate to do some really special things for the people of Durham. In fact, my favorite event on Durham's social calendar is the annual Seniors' Holiday Party sponsored by Parks and Rec. I

think that the department does a great job in engaging the community. One possible area for consideration is intentionally branding each of our almost 70 city parks to the neighborhoods in which they're located and encourage local residents to develop a corresponding celebration or observance.

Racial Equity

6. How does race equity play into your view of governance? Will you ensure that race equity is part of your leadership/governance? If so, how?

The machinations and policies of the government since the advent of this republic are precisely why race equity is necessary. I have sat through numerous racial equity trainings and currently serve on the race equity task force for the North Carolina League of Municipalities where I sit on the board of directors. The most dramatic moment for me without fail is when the corpus of laws and policies (government output) circumscribing the lives of Black people is graphically depicted before trainees. It is the “a ha” moment when objective, clear eyed participants realize that racism is not just a matter of individual actions but rather has been infused in the fabric of our nation

since the first arrivals in 1619. The application of a race equity lens, and then not flinching from what the lens magnifies, is at the heart of my public service. It is why I have called for a Marshall Plan type infusion of municipal funds into Durham's historic legacy neighborhoods. Over a year ago I called for a 2 million dollar municipal experimental with Basic Income. When COVID struck I knew that 2 million dollars of city money would probably not be realistic. I am extremely gratified to be one of the leaders of a \$500,000 trial with Guaranteed Income that will launch this fall in Durham focused on individuals that have been involved with the justice system. I also advocated for a transformation of the budgetary culture of Durham by establishing a goal of spending up to 10% of whatever we spend on policing on initiatives that would make police contact less likely. Ironically, when our city's racial equity task force was about to be impaneled it was going to happen with NO BLACK MEN on it. I asked for the vote to be delayed and for the composition of the task force to be revisited. Fortunately, this resulted in the addition of Black men on the task force and the avoidance of what I believe would have been an unfortunate and curious start to our city's work on racial equity.

7. What is your position on the county/city of Durham establishing a dedicated Race Equity Fund? Please explain.

I am already on record with my belief that given the historic nature and systemic impact of racism that the entire city budget should be viewed as the dedicated race equity fund. What area of civic life or governmental activity has been exempt from the stain of systemic racism? From the conditions of roads, the placement and conditions of parks, to who gets promoted through the ranks of fire and police services there are clearly visible patterns that are directly traceable to historic government policies. I have no idea how much should be placed in a Race Equity Fund and am fearful that a pre-determined amount may morph into a fixed article of “this is all the capacity we have” at this time to address an issue that undergirds our entire financial superstructure. The work of Race Equity requires a constant scrubbing and deconstructing of our entire budget and organizational chart and a willingness to spend or stop spending at the macro level if we are truly to make the systemic changes that the genuine work of race equity demands.

8. How, if at all, should Durham utilize the 2020 Durham Racial Equity Taskforce Report?

The 2020 Durham Racial Equity Taskforce Report is indeed a “love letter” to Durham that challenges us to translate love into action. The report is required reading for all who lead and aspire to lead our city. I believe that the observations and recommendations in the report should directly inform and influence policy choices moving forward. Given the attention that it has received from GOP leaders in Raleigh lately it would seem that its adoption as policy is already being anticipated.

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?

The only way I can “ensure” anything is if it’s mine. Since my days as part of the leadership apparatus of Durham Congregations, Associations and Neighborhoods (Durham CAN) I have organized around and advocated for the use of city owned land to build affordable housing. I have supported these

initiatives since being elected to the city council and will continue to do so if re-elected. The ability to definitively dictate what happens on land we own stands in stark contrast to what we can make happen on privately owned land. This in no way means that we are totally powerless but raw power slides more into the realm of influence when your name isn't on the deed. Can we just stop approving developments that don't "align with our values" provided we actually come up with an agreed upon statement of values that doesn't arouse the scrutiny of the state legislature? Perhaps; but we can't screw around with it. We have to say it unequivocally and with the force of our city's imprimatur and then be prepared for the onslaught Undeclared de facto moratoriums are irresponsible and could jeopardize the very financial trajectory of our city. In addition to using our own land to ensure affordability there are some other tools that are perhaps less effective but that I have supported. The city's density bonus and Expanded Housing Choices are options that provide the city some leverage. If I might take a point of privilege - I am amazed at the number of affordable housing advocates I encounter who aren't as equally engaged when it comes to Black upward mobility and the expansion of the base of Black wealth. Establishing and maintaining housing stock for household with income less than \$15/hour must be joined with

advocacy for opportunities for people making \$15/hour to make more money.

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?

The Comprehensive Plan is not a policy document. It is an aspirational treatise that is reflective of the input and values of those that were privileged to participate in its creation. With that said I believe that small dwelling units represent a potentially powerful tool in achieving density and affordability. However, a policy that simply states “at least 20% small dwelling units in new residential developments” requires some contextualization. “Small” does not automatically translate into affordable. How common a motif is it in cities all over the country where cramped studio apartments or detached homes that are on par with a shack are going for thousands of dollars monthly or for sale prices in the high six figures? Location matters. 20% small homes that are next to 80% larger homes that are selling north of a half million dollars

may be less expensive but not necessarily “affordable” at least in terms of what I believe the animating spirit of this question to be. I return to an earlier refrain of mine that using city owned land to build a dense and affordable small home community is a more attainable goal than compelling developers. This question of course crosses the threshold of being purely hypothetical given our current statutory context. However, in a perfect world in which I was allowed to enforce inclusionary zoning and make developers do things sure I’d support this policy with the nuanced understanding of its potential and limits I’ve already mentioned.

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?

I will continue to encourage our planning department to impress upon developers that in Durham not holding multiple community meetings is not an option. I believe that the planning department should have a dedicated opportunity for our residents similar to the Citizens Police Academy to demystify the planning process and explore the historical, legal, and moral implications of private ownership vis a vis

public good. I not only support small area plans for Durham neighborhoods but have called for Marshall Plan type investment in Durham's legacy neighborhoods to bring equity based small area plans to fruition.

12. How will you expand bus service, so riders can connect across Durham? What transportation infrastructure is most pressing to fund and expand?

The expansion of bus service, if it is to be successful and sustained, must occur organically and in tandem with the patterns and needs of the ridership. There are also issues of equipment acquisition and maintenance, hiring and retaining good drivers, and combatting the stigma of our public transportation system in order to diversify our ridership. Adding new routes without the personnel to service them consistently and continually would be a disservice to those riders that frequent them. I not only want to expand bus service but I also want it to be free. Durham should make sidewalks, safe and clean bus shelters, ride on demand alternatives, and bike lanes the focus of our transportation funding and expansion. I will continue to work closely with and listen to our transportation experts who are committed to making Durham's public transportation system the envy of North Carolina.

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?

Let's be clear that it hasn't only been "private investment" operating in a vacuum that has displaced Black people. The dissection of Hayti by NC 147 was a government initiative. The revitalization of the South Side community was spurred by municipal investment. In fact, the stage for private investment in legacy Black neighborhoods at bargain basement prices historically has been set by government neglect and disinvestment. Anyone that laments gentrification and the displacement of Black people in Durham that also isn't a champion of the restoration of Black wealth and reparations is a confounding presence in this discussion. What is the difference between a White family that can afford their mortgage and home repair costs and a Black family that can't? I believe Durham has exceeded its quota of housing advocates that aren't also pushing the city on its Shared Economic Prosperity Plan. The City and County could and should continue to provide grants and interest free forgivable loans to long term

residents to assist them in paying rising property taxes. The City and County could invest millions to scale up the Basic Income program I called for over a year ago. The City and County could invest millions in a Marshall Plan type initiative that I've called for focused on Durham's Black legacy neighborhoods.

14. Energy affordability is an under appreciated aspect of housing affordability. What steps can the City take to ensure high electricity bills do not force residents out of their homes?

The city can firstly become a source of information for residents on strategies to monitor and control energy consumption. Durham's municipal government through entities such as the Planning and Inspections department, and Neighborhood Improvement Services can act as an advocate for renters who often bear the brunt of energy costs associated with delayed repairs that are the responsibility of landlords. Although Durham is not a provider of electricity, as are some other municipalities, the development of an energy hardship fund similar to the one that is maintained for assistance with water bills is something that should be considered.

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?

We must take care not to conflate equity with equality. The pursuit of Equity by definition does not place new arrivals in league with long-time residents. This is one of the most difficult elements to grasp by people who have never actually sat through racial equity training yet attempt to speak the language. How do we cajole profit driven national developers to employ an equity lens when pursuing their goal to make as much money as possible? I have no idea. What I will continue to do is to invite developers to make significant contributions to our affordable housing fund. I will continue to encourage our planning department to remind developers about our density bonus and our respect for legacy neighborhoods. I will continue to ask our legislative delegation to fight for more local discretionary power when it comes to inclusionary zoning. I will continue to probe developers about the amount of community outreach they've done and their sensitivity to the flavor of Durham neighborhoods. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, absent a seismic shift in our legal constraints, I will continue to push for Durham to acquire and/or use our own land to build the kind of developments we want for our city.

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?

The disparity in Durham's tree canopy and the presence of unpaved roads in Durham are dramatic illustrations of historical inequities. We are the 4th largest city in North Carolina and reportedly the 2nd best place to live in the United States. Durham should set a goal that all remaining public dirt and gravel roads within the corporate city limits will be paved resident petitions or requests notwithstanding. The presence of a tree canopy brings with it numerous benefits ranging from respiratory health to heat management. Durham should bolster and fast track its efforts to expand our tree canopy to historically underserved and marginalized areas. Addressing climate and environmental justice issues could potentially open up entirely new markets and job opportunities for Durham residents that have been impacted by historical disparities and injustices. "Green economy" jobs such as solar panel

installation could be life changing for many Durham families.

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.

How are we defining “major”? Is there an industry specific financial threshold an entity must cross to be considered major? What if the major developer has a significant part of its portfolio invested in affordable housing initiatives? The premise of this question creates the impression that all municipal regulatory powers are created equal. As a sitting council member in the state of North Carolina I can most assuredly say that they are not. However, there are indeed multiple areas in which city officials exercise power. City officials also approve lucrative contracts for fleet vehicles, janitorial services, servicing water infrastructure, and can approve significant employee salary increases or defund an entire department just to name a few. For each of these areas there is a corresponding non-governmental interest that makes campaign donations to office holders and candidates all over the country. Given the wide spectrum of unique powers exercised by city government officials, it may be fair to ask will you accept campaign

donations from any interest other than private (or seemingly private) individuals? With all this being said I am generally leery of money from outside of Durham seeking to influence our municipal elections and governance either in the form of campaign donations, or running issue specific ads on television. There may very well be donations to my campaign from individuals or interests that deal in real estate who may be considered major by some and small time by others. I think the underlying animating spirit of this question is if local politicians govern in the interest of those that fund them? I believe even a casual glance at my voting record and public utterances will indicate that I'm not on the take for anyone.

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?

One of the things I'm most proud of having worked on during my first term in office is Durham's Guaranteed Income Pilot. The funding for this pilot is being provided by a private source. I believe that our city should be prepared to use municipal funds for another iteration of guaranteed income beyond our

scheduled pilot. I have also advocated for a Marshall Plan type infusion of funds into Durham's legacy Black neighborhood beginning with an immediate reprioritizing of our Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to address low hanging fruit such as sidewalk installation and road repairs. We have in fact already raised taxes to support equitable and green infrastructure projects which I supported.

19. What is your position on providing public incentives to private firms to promote economic development in Durham?

Governments don't make anything. All we do is levy and raise taxes and provide services. Aside from the coercive power of violence, the most impactful way government asserts itself is through how it spends the people's money. The creative and selective use of public funds in partnership with private interests is a long established practice that has yielded many public amenities ranging from parks to ballfields all over the country. I wish that corporate and private interests were inherently altruistic. They are not. This is not to say that many entities aren't serious about good corporate citizenship but the bottom line is still the bottom line. One of the issues I have leaned in on most during my time on the council is the prioritizing of our Shared Economic Prosperity Plan which is

aimed at increasing participation in Durham's booming economy. A significant part of the plan involves leveraging relationships with current and potential corporate citizens to financially empower historically left out people. In addition to making the moral and business case well crafted incentive packages can play an important part in the success of the plan. I have voted along with my council colleagues for several incentive packages during my time on the council and have found the math in terms of tax revenues and targeted job creation palatable. However, it is critical that they be scrutinized on a case by case basis and result in verifiable good accruing to the city in a relatively reasonable amount of time.

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, and where would they come from?

It has been over a year since I publicly called for the hiring, training, and deploying of unarmed mental health responders in Durham. I made the proposal based upon my concern over the number of people (particularly of color) that have been killed or brutalized by law enforcement while experiencing mental stress or trauma that was misinterpreted as a threat or as non-compliance. As an elected official with governing responsibility I also feel that the more robust a menu of response options the government has the better. My belief then as it is now is that unarmed mental health responders are not meant to replace but rather to augment. So in short I support the premise of our new Community Safety Department and am committed to its success. However, I believe that viewing it within an either/or framework is not good for our city. With respect to the fifteen frozen positions I was one of the 6 council members in our 6-1 vote that supported the compromise to freeze them. It is important to note that the freeze was in no way a fait accompli that the 15 positions would be automatically transferred at a later date. The understanding was that our staff would come back with recommendations based upon initial performance data of the department. One of those recommendations could be transferring any number up to 15 of those positions if in their assessment it was warranted. Any other characterization of our vote will be borne out by the record as errant. I trust our

city manager and our staff and firmly believe they will carry out the will of the Council and will provide nothing but honest and professional advice to us as we make decisions. I voted for the compromise in good faith and I will take seriously whatever case the staff makes. For those who are committed to the transfer as an article of faith notwithstanding the staff's data based recommendations I offer this observation: The rationale for transferring positions from the Durham Police Department was because they were unfilled. Wouldn't it be ironic to put our new Community Safety Department right at its advent in precisely the same state for which we critiqued the department we're taking the positions from? If the staff says we don't need them yet then what type of benefit accrues to the people of Durham by playing a shell game with empty positions on our organizational chart? I have no interest in performative politics or posturing. As for the potential success of the pilot programs there really isn't a set of metrics and I'm not even sure if there should be. If a grand total of one person in mental crisis is served with compassion and has their life preserved then the program is successful in my assessment. This is the measure when our mental health responders are viewed as part of a continuum of response rather than as a non-negotiable alternative. I reject the notion that this is a zero sum game proposition.

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.

As police departments go, the Durham Police Department is one of North Carolina's best in terms of training, leadership, certifications, use of force numbers, specialized outreach (LatinX and LGBTQIA+), and citizen generated complaints. With that said there is still much work to be done. So no I'm not "satisfied" but I am committed to build on the work and historical successes of organizations like the FADE Coalition, Spirit House, All Of Us Or None, Southerners On New Ground, the NAACP, People's Alliance, Durham CAN, and others that worked tirelessly to literally transform the culture and expectations of our city's police department and laid the groundwork for a leader like former Chief Cerelyn Davis. The work and impact of the campaign led by FADE is real and should not be discounted nor considered finished. I'm a leader of a growing American city. Increases and/or decreases in a workforce is not simply a matter of ideology. I would commit to freezing and/or reducing police staffing tomorrow if I were also given the power to freeze Durham's population growth. Any attempt at actual

governance without holding these numbers in tension with one another is respectfully non-sensical. We now have a whole department, which I support, dedicated to fielding unarmed mental health responders. This is good. But how many people in mental distress did the Durham Police Department murder last year? How many officers were needed to create and secure a perimeter for our firefighters to respond on that dark day when our city was rocked by a gas explosion which at first we didn't know was terrorism or not? How many people were shot in Durham last night or will be this evening before I transmit this questionnaire? Our city needs leaders that aren't interested in making the realities on the ground in Durham fit into a predetermined ideological mold. We need leaders that will insist that ALL of our employees, including the police, conduct their business in accordance with our values and who aren't afraid to snatch badges when necessary.

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?

In 2016 I voted for Bernie Sanders in the primary election, and Hillary Clinton in the general election for President. I voted for Roy Cooper for Governor.

In 2020 I voted for Elizabeth Warren in the primary election, and Joe Biden in the general election for President. I voted for Roy Cooper for Governor.

In 2020 I voted for Cal Cunningham for US Senate.