

## **PA-PAC Questionnaire for Mayor and City Council Candidates – 2017**

*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 try to confine your responses within the word limits set for each question. They should be generous. Do not feel obliged to exhaust the limit for each question.*

**Please return the completed form along with your resume describing education, work history, community service, and prior political experience as soon as possible, but by July 30, 2017, at the latest.**

**You may e-mail your responses to Tom Miller at [tom-miller1@nc.rr.com](mailto: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: LeVon Barnes

Office for which you have filed for election (circle one): Mayor / City Council Ward 1 2 3

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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? What would you do about it if elected? *Please limit your answer to 300 words.*

**An economy for all is the most important issue confronting city government. We don't have enough jobs in Durham. People have to commute to the surrounding cities for work. We have businesses coming in, but they're bringing in people to fill those positions rather than hiring locally. We need to build better relations with these businesses and other private businesses and then train the local workforce for these jobs. We need sustainable long lasting jobs for an under-skilled work force. And this includes better public transportation so accessibility is no longer a barrier for people.**

2. What can the city do to lift the wages of the lowest paid workers in Durham and reduce growing income inequality in our community? Where in our community do you see opportunities for city government to address the racial wealth gap? *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**In order to lift the wages of the lowest paid workers in Durham and reduce growing income inequality in our community we need to pay every Durham citizen a living wage. Although the NC State Legislature determines the minimum wage laws, we can provide incentives to businesses to encourage a living wage. Additionally, the city government needs to develop more public and private partnerships with businesses to provide sustainable jobs. Short-term jobs will not end the racial wealth gap.**

3. Describe your interest in and commitment to public amenities such as playing fields, open space, street trees, traffic calming, and walking and biking facilities. Are you willing to raise property taxes to provide for and maintain these amenities? Are public amenities allocated to neighborhoods of different wealth and income levels equitably? Please explain and cite examples. *Please limit your answer to 500 words.*

**Our public amenities such as playing fields, open space, traffic calming, and walking and bike facilities need major upgrades and improvements. I am hesitant to raise property taxes as many residents are already struggling to pay their property taxes. However, as Durham continues to experience economic growth, the city's financially secure residents can afford additional property taxes, which in turn can be used to fund projects in Durham's previously underserved areas. This would help to redistribute concentrated wealth to better ensure all of Durham's residents benefit from a more equitable distribution of amenities. Additionally, we need to support organizations like Twenty for Trails that has developed a plan to increase greenways across Durham with a special focus on less-served neighborhoods. By increasing greenways and bike trails, we'll provide alternate transportation opportunities to all neighborhoods, decreasing traffic congestion and improving air quality.**

4. How should the city measure the benefits and costs of incentives to promote development especially as those benefits and costs affect low-income residents of Durham? How would you use these measurements when deciding to vote for or against a proposed incentive? *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**Growth is great, but growth on the backs of people who do not have is not growth that we should celebrate nor promote. The city should measure the benefits and costs of incentives by taking a hard look at whom exactly will be benefited by the development. I will look at measurements to see how many jobs would be provided, whether or not the jobs will benefit those living in Durham or if it will bring in people to fill the position. I will look at measurements to see if property values go up and if so, will people in the neighborhood be able to continue living there or will they get pushed out. We need to approach all policies through a lens of equity. With every new policy we make, we need to ensure that those who have historically benefited the least will be among those who now stand to benefit the most. Durham is rapidly changing; residents who have called this city home for generations should be among the first to see these benefits, not be pushed out of their homes because of rising property values. We need to make sure the current people in Durham can afford living here, and those people will be my focus when measuring the benefits and costs of incentives for development.**

5. What actions should the city take to expand job creation and job quality? In your answer, please comment on the city's potential involvement in entrepreneurship, worker-owned cooperatives, and union organizing. *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**The order to expand job creation and job quality the city needs to increase opportunities for small business owners, worker-owned cooperatives, and union organizations. Durham can be the most progressive city of the South but that means training our workforce in innovative jobs like clean energy and technology. We need to bring in jobs and train our local workforce offering opportunities for full-time employment. We cannot continue to support a system where people are forced to spend the majority of their income on rent, especially when they have a mouth to feed. Families deserve better. These parents want to make a better life for themselves and their children. Everybody should be feeling the growth in this city and believe that this is the kind of Durham we want.**

**Areas of Durham are not experiencing the economic windfall that areas such as downtown are experiencing. We must advocate for a Durham where the whole city takes part in the economic prosperity we are experiencing. In areas of Durham that are not experiencing investment and growth, we must provide incentives for companies to train and build there, especially in areas where low-income residents must rely on public transportation. Such trainings should be held in places that are no more than 2 bus stops from these neighborhoods. Additionally, we need to change the culture of the kind of jobs to which people in low-income neighborhoods can aspire. We must create internship and job shadowing opportunities for young people from low-income neighborhoods and encourage their participation in jobs ranging from white collar to trade. This will create a relationship between employers and a labor force that is unemployed and underemployed. Again, these opportunities must be accessible and ideally no more than two bus stops away from low-income neighborhoods.**

#### **Housing, City Planning, and Neighborhoods**

6. What does "gentrification" mean to you? What, if anything, should be done about it? How, if at all, is the issue of gentrification implicated in the Planning Department's current review of zoning in East Durham, the proposed creation of an Alston Avenue Design District, and the redevelopment of the former Fayette Place property? *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**Gentrification occurs during the process of upgrading and enhancing neighborhoods that have long been underappreciated by both communities and the government. In its truest form, gentrification could be a positive occurrence; however, it's over taken by capitalism and is now where people who are the least served are driven out of the homes they have lived their whole lives so that real estate companies can build new homes and more affluent families can move into the neighborhood. We need to make sure that long-term residents are not being displaced, but rather, part of this revitalization these underappreciated neighborhoods are experiencing. I'm in favor of the Planning Department's current plan on giving the Durham Housing Authority a \$4 million grant to purchase the Fayette Place property. I would like that property to have mixed zoning, just like some apartment places downtown Durham, which would allow for housing units, businesses, and green spaces, so the people in the neighborhood would have a community full of accessible development.**

7. What should the city seek to accomplish through its power to stimulate and regulate growth? What principles and considerations will guide your decisions in zoning cases and other development issues? Illustrate your answer with a recent controversial zoning case. Did the city decide the case correctly? *Please limit your answer to 500 words.*

**The city should use its power to stimulate and regulate growth while accomplishing a mixed development of residential, business, and environmentally friendly growth. Neighborhoods need to have businesses close by for easy access to jobs. Neighborhoods need to have greenways and parks close by to promote a healthy lifestyle. Having all of these elements will increase the likelihood of mixed-income housing and decrease the likelihood of gentrification occurring in the future.**

8. Does the city adequately fund its affordable housing plan? If no, what funding are you willing to fight for in the next budget for affordable homes for lower income Durham renters, homebuyers and homeowners? Where will the money come from? *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**The city does not adequately fund its affordable housing plan. We need to provide green, high-quality affordable housing in mixed-income communities where we can do a combination of income-restricted affordable housing and “market” affordable housing. Implementing this will protect those whose wages cannot compete with rising market costs but also allow some insulation for property owners to ask for higher prices commensurate with the current housing market.**

**We must preserve and expand access to affordable rental housing units by providing vouchers for neighborhoods for people who fall at or below 60% average median income (AMI). In order to do this, we need to allocate additional money for DHA to hire more staff so they can find, support, and follow up with local property owners who agree to accept vouchers. These staffers will support these landlords with repairs as well as developing tools and strategies to keep them engaged in the program and provide feedback for success. We need to also create extra incentives for developers who allow access to housing those who fall at or below 60% AMI, especially in appreciating neighborhoods or in areas that are being developed. Durham must commit to maintain affordability and protect low-income Durham residents, with a focus on households at or below 60% AMI, in neighborhoods experiencing significant price appreciation.**

**Durham also needs to incentivize both property owners to enable renters to become owners for properties they rent and let renters know where these programs exist. We should also support the construction, acquisition and rehabilitation of existing units to be sold to low-income buyers, with resale restrictions to ensure that units remain accessible in the long run. Rehabilitation and construction will be eco-friendly to keep costs affordable for tenants. Maintaining homes that low-income residents have is important. I will continue to advocate for funds for minor repairs for low-income seniors and those with disabilities, while expanding it those who fall below 60% AMI.**

9. Under what circumstances would you vote to approve a rezoning that does not include commitments to meet the city’s affordable housing goal? If you answered yes, how would you ensure that the city meet its goal? Please illustrate your answer with a recent case. *Please limit your answer to 500 words.*

**We must hold a hard line in demanding that all residential rezoning projects include affordable housing. Although state law unfortunately does not allow for inclusive affordable housing, we can create limited city-subsidized inclusive affordable housing and work with developers to ensure that**

affordable housing will soon reach the need Durham has for it. For example, the proposed Fayette Place property affordable housing project should include both affordable housing and businesses. And that would require a rezoning to meet that goal, which I would support.

#### **City Finances, Capital Improvements, Transportation, and City Services**

10. If the city needs more revenue for a basic public service, do you, in general, favor a new or increased user fee or a property tax increase? Residential trash pickup is an example of a basic service. *Please limit your answer to 250 words.*

**I will only support an increased user fee or property tax if the city government increases affordable housing and access to sustainable jobs. Some residents can afford a tax increase, others cannot. And we can't increase taxes until all of the people of Durham can afford to live here. I would also support a user fee or property tax increase if it was a sliding fee based on income. Because of gentrification, there's an influx of residents who can afford to pay higher property taxes, which should be used to help those with less remain in their homes. Income inequity can be redistributed and used to benefit historically underserved communities.**

11. Do you support or oppose Durham's plans for rail-based transit? If federal funding for the project is denied, what must Durham do about transportation, urban planning, housing, taxes, and infrastructure? *Please limit your answer to 500 words.*

**I support Durham's plans for rail-based transit, but we need to make sure all of Durham's communities would stand to benefit from the rail. It should increase transportation and accessibility in historically underserved communities. And subsidized rail and bus passes for lower income, student, and older residents. However if federal funding for the project is denied, then we cannot continue to focus on it. Regardless of what progress we make on rail transit, we must improve intra-city transit and ensure that it is affordable for all, allowing access from poorer communities to jobs in the inner city.**

12. Has the city's investment in bus transportation reached the population which needs it most? What else can be done to improve bus transportation access and affordability? *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**The city's investment in bus transportation has not reached the population which needs it most. We need to dramatically increase our public bus system so it's accessible and affordable to all. Right now, people are having trouble keeping their jobs because of the unreliable system. With a \$1 price per single fare, it seems affordable, but for many that's \$2 or more dollars a day, which is upwards of \$10 a week. That's grocery money! And many people have to take multiple buses to get to work, spending hours riding the bus to get to one location when driving could take 20 minutes or less. That is time people could be working, running personal errands, or taking care of their family. We must consider time when addressing the bus's affordability. Right now some businesses provide their employees with free or reduced bus passes to make sure they have transportation to work. We need to incentivize this program so every business offers this to their employees. Additionally, we need to add bus routes and busses so people can go to and from work and home quicker.**

13. Would you support a property tax relief program, for example, a circuit breaker, to reduce the tax burden on homeowners with limited resources and help them stay in their homes? If your answer is yes, please describe the program or programs you would support. If your answer is no, please explain. *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**I would support a property tax relief program to reduce the tax burden on homeowners with limited resources and help them stay in their homes. The city of Durham wants mixed-income housing, but we continue to see families pushed out of their homes. If we help keep families in their homes, we'll be support the goal of mixed-income housing without having to build new homes.**

### **Policing and Public Safety**

14. Is there a trust problem between the people of Durham and the police department? Are you satisfied with the department's responses to issues of use of force, racial profiling, deployment of personnel, searches, and communication with the public? *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**People are getting shot. There are nonprofits and community groups who are working to strengthen community and police relations, but it's time for the local government to step in. We need to work with police to create community training programs on race, equity, and how to build community partnerships.**

15. To what degree, if any, should the city cooperate with U.S. Department of Immigration & Customs Enforcement? Should the city become a sanctuary city? If your answer is yes, for whom should the city provide sanctuary and by what means should sanctuary be provided? If your answer is no, please explain your reasons. In either case, please be specific. *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**The city does not need to cooperate with U.S. Department of Immigration & Customs Enforcement. People are getting detained. Durham has declared itself a sanctuary city, however if we're going to declare that, then we need to act like it. We must protect our residents and families in Durham. I will protect all DACA residents and talk out against immigration status checkpoints set up by police officers. We must have volunteer lawyers on call to provide legal assistance for immigrants and their families. We cannot allow national politics to infringe upon our recognition that no person is illegal and that the lives led by undocumented immigrants in Durham are just as valid and important to protect as the lives led by those born in the United States. We must use every tool available to us to ensure that no Durham residents will be unfairly or inhumanely deported.**

16. Should the city allocate more, less, or about the same money to policing? Please explain your answer. If your answer is less, would you allocate more money to other services to improve public safety? Again, please explain. *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**The city does not need more or less money allocated to policing, but rather to reorient how that money is spent. We should focus on community policing initiatives that ingrain the police officers with the communities they police. As a coach, I would support implementing a free basketball program for kids across the city where the coaches would be police officers. Studies have shown that this would cut down both on crime and excessive use of force. We should also use a portion of the budget toward vouchers that police officers can hand out to people, but especially the youth, to recognize good behaviors. Officers will learn to look for good behaviors in addition to illegal activity and the**

**community will learn to not always associate the police with negative sentiments. This program will help engender trust between the two groups and humanize the other.**

### **Civil Rights**

17. Name one issue in Durham that directly impacts, or is directly impacted by, race inequity and how can the city incorporate a race equity framework in addressing this issue? *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**Using the racial equity framework when creating more opportunities for youth will directly impact race inequity in Durham. Like many people, I didn't grow up with a lot of opportunities. But I had the chance to attend summer camp through a program offered by the city. This program exposed me to arts, culture, and a lifestyle that as a young boy growing up in Staten Island, NY I wouldn't have had the opportunity to learn otherwise. Those experiences molded me into the person I am today. I know how important those programs were for me and how important they are for our youth today. We need to show that we really care about the future of our youth by investing in their lives and investing in Durham. When students graduate high school, what kind of Durham are these students walking into? Is it a Durham of opportunities and inclusiveness? We need to strengthen the summer internship program by developing better relationships with local business and nonprofits, creating opportunities for our youth. They need to learn trades and tangible skills that will benefit them and Durham, enhancing the quality of life for all people, whether they choose to go to college or enter the workforce.**

18. If the city could adopt an ordinance concerning the civil rights of members of the LGBTQ community, what provisions should that ordinance contain? *Please limit your answer to 400 words.*

**If the city could adopt an ordinance concerning the civil rights of member of the LGBTQ+ community, such an ordinance should dictate that no one can be fired, denied housing, or denied a publicly available service on account of their sexuality, gender identity, or romantic attraction. Any business or person found in violation of this ordinance would be required to reinstate the tenant/employee and pay a fine, which would be used to enforce this provision and other provisions designed to protect the civil rights and liberties of minorities. I believe the city should adopt such an ordinance, whether or not the state would allow it to be enforced.**

### **Personal and Political**

19. Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offence other than a minor traffic offense? If your answer to this question is yes, please describe the charge or charges, the circumstances, and the outcome. *Please limit your answer to 250 words.*

**No.**

20. For whom did you vote in the 2012 and 2016 presidential and gubernatorial elections? For whom did you vote in the 2014 U. S. Senate election? *Please limit your answer to 100 words.*

**In the 2012 presidential election I voted for Barack Obama. In 2016 presidential election I voted for Hillary Clinton. In the 2012 gubernatorial election I was living in Pennsylvania, but voted for Tom Wolf in 2014, the democratic candidate. In the 2016 gubernatorial election I voted for Roy Cooper. In the**

**2014 U.S. Senate election I voted for Kay Hagan.**