

John Rooks – City Council Ward 2

Government and Public Good

1. Of all the issues confronting city government, which issue is the most important to you and why? What would you do about it if elected?

Of all the issues confronting city government, the issue most important to me is the one of developing affordable housing that addresses and reduces the socioeconomic disparities that have been created throughout our communities. Recognizing that affordability is relative to those struggling to make a living wage. As an elected official, I would combat such disparities by advocating affordable housing on the premise of financial inclusion for so many of Durham's native residents as well as the influx of those who have only recently begun to call Durham home.

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?

Over the past ten years, the rate of poverty in our city has increased annually; I don't see more minimum wage jobs being a solution. What the city can do to lift the wages of the lowest paid workers in Durham is create City/Community Partnerships and paid training programs that serves as a viable resource to that community. City government has a tremendous opportunity to give credence to socioeconomic reform in those communities that have benefitted the least from Durham's current revitalization efforts.

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.

My interest and commitment to establishing and maintaining public amenities is relative to the areas for which they've gone underserve and lacking. These public amenities have not been equally allocated in neighborhoods of lesser wealth and income status. I believe the public regard should not be based on inequalities, but rather with total regard to our city communities equally possessing the opportunity to enjoy such amenities. I don't believe that we need to raise taxes to do so; rather, reallocate available resources toward public amenity maintenance and improvements.

To cite one example:

Burton Park at McDougal Terrace is sloped and primarily bare of grassy playing or pic-nic areas. It would be a simple and very affordable solution to terrace and level pre-determined areas of that park, seed it for proper grass coverage, and beautify its landscape with added trees and shrubs.

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?

I believe that the benefits and costs of incentives to promote development should be measured by the value and significance it adds to the community, and by the positive affect of those applied incentives. By always weighing the greater good for our city, community, and the citizens of Durham, I believe the deciding factor of any vote for or against such incentives can be made with confidence. I stand on the paradigm principle that, "Costs tell us very little, but the return tells us everything." The investment in our human resources, for the betterment of our city, will always be worth the cost.

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.

The city has a significant onus in expanding job creation and job quality. In as much as our developments and progresses in recent years has inspired an influx in residency, it should be our goal to see thriving businesses and new entrepreneurs meet employment demands. I would like to see City/Community Partnerships create employment opportunities. I would like to see incentives for Cooperative Housing plans, cooperative markets in urban food deserts or places where limited access to healthy food choices are available, and cooperative efforts in Sustainability

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 implemented 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?

To me, gentrification is the intentional creation of circumstance to force the removal of residents from historically low-income communities, by rapid economic development in low-income areas. Yes, something needs to be done about it. It should be that we reverse the stigma of what gentrification has represented for the masses of residents who have been displaced by the process of gentrification, and truly apply our efforts to empowering and revitalizing these communities.

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

The city should seek to accomplish equitable growth within the communities of Durham, continue to lead the way in innovative progresses toward building a thriving economy, remaining focused upon smart growth and sustainability, and making Durham a place for all citizen to feel safe and call home. As it pertains to my considerations for decisions in zoning issues, I'm lead by the principle belief of being fair and equitable, and that the collective voice of the residents of a community should always carry weight towards resolve. While there have been past controversial zoning issues, such as Kentington Heights and 751, and the recent issue regarding Publix, I am more interested in effectively mitigating controversial zoning issues, and progressively moving forward in equitable solutions.

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?

Based on observations of limited affordable housing availability, and the gross effects of gentrification, resources are not being adequately allocated for affordable housing. This question seems to answer itself, but I would be willing to fight for funding for affordable homes for lower income Durham renters, homebuyers and homeowners when discussing the next budget. Regarding where these funds would come from, I submit that the funds come from over expenditures the city has meted out in past budgets.

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 meets its goal? Please illustrate your answer with a recent case.

Under no circumstance would I vote to approve a rezoning that does not include commitments to meet the city's affordable housing goal.

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.

Generally, I would prefer not to need to increase property taxes. However, I think property taxes are the most equitable solution for supporting basic public services. I feel that user fees can be regressive, and I would instead, favor small incremental adjustments to property taxes.

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?

There are aspects of the plan for Durham having a rail transit that I would support, but as it pertains to Durham's immediate future, I do not deem it an appropriate time consider this issue one of immediate relevance. There are more impending issues that should be address for Durham's foreseeable future. There is a federal obligation to fund various segments of local municipality efforts, however, if certain funding should be cut for housing, urban planning, transportation or infrastructure, it is the onus of this council review our current resources versus those expenditures and streamline, prioritize and effectively mitigate the burden of funding cuts.

12. Has the city's investment in bus transportation reached the population which needs it he most? What else can be done to improve bus transportation access and affordability?

The current bus transportation system is reaching the population most in need of its service. The improvement to be made is revealed in investigating other cities abilities to provide a free public transportation service as opposed to charging already over-burdened taxpayers.

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 l their homes? If your answer is yes, please describe the program or programs you would support. If your answer is no, please explain.

If the circuit breaker is based upon a grant as opposed to a loan type relief, then yes, I would support a tax relief program.

Policing and Public Safety

14. Is there a trust problem between the people of Durham and the police department? Are you satisfied with the departments responses to issues of force, racial profiling, deployment of personnel, searches, and communication with the public?

Yes, there is a trust issue between the community and law enforcement. In recent reports, it has been determined that Durham Police Department has struggled with trust issues, but with the most recent hire of the current police chief, efforts have been made to regain public trust in the Durham community. Racial disparities, while not completely alleviated, efforts by the new police chief, such as discontinuing stop and frisk, random road blocks, along with the collaboration with local community organizations, the issues that the community have concerns about are being sufficiently addressed.

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.

I believe the city should maintain the current practice of providing safe sanctuary to all of our immigrant brothers and sisters. Those sanctuary practices should apply to any person or persons not of U.S. status that choose to seek residency in Durham.

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.

Allotments should be based on the needs of the community during the current year of budget proposals. My concerns are that police are taking on rolls and having to deal with issues beyond policing. I would like to see more monies going toward those areas of police responsibilities. Resources need to be allocated for other service areas, but not at the expense of defunding the police department.

Civil Rights

17. Name one issue in Durham that directly impacts, or is directly impacted by, race inequality and how can the city incorporate a race framework in addressing this issue.

One of the issues in Durham that directly impacts racial inequality is the issue of affordable housing, and the predominate effect of gentrification. I would propose we convene a committee of multi-economic status to address rent stabilization, and to create a policy for ensuring income-based housing for low income residents.

18. If the city should adopt an ordinance concerning the civil rights of members of the LGBTQ community, what provisions should that ordinance contain?

I would support ordinances designed to protect members of the LGBTQ community from all forms of discrimination in employment, public accommodations, housing and access to government benefits.

Personal and Political

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

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?

In every election, I believe that I cast my ballot for the correct candidate. As it is a privilege for every citizen to vote in privacy, I fail to see the relevance of this question as it pertains to my running for public office.