

## **PA PAC Questionnaire for Durham Board of County Commissioners – 2024**

**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 Wednesday, January 3 at 5pm at the latest.**

***Please also include a high resolution headshot for the PA mailer in case you are endorsed.***

**Please email your responses to the PAC coordinators at [papacboard@googlegroups.com](mailto:papacboard@googlegroups.com) by**

**Wednesday, January 3 at 5pm**

**Please note that following the Wednesday, January 3 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.**

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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 are elected?

*My vision is affordable housing for all in Durham. Residents of all incomes should be able to live (and thrive!) in the Bull City– and that includes the right to safe, affordable homes. There are several programs that I will continue to support (and hope even to see expand, such as tax assistance to help lower-income homeowners stay in their homes). I will be an advocate for new homes for our low-income renters and buyers. I know I am in good company for fighting for these things– we have so many in our community leading for progressive change around these critical issues, including PA's action teams and groups like Sunrise Durham and the Coalition for Affordable Housing and Transit.*

*We need to stop evictions; advocate new homes for low-income renters and home buyers; expand tax assistance to help lower-income homeowners stay in their homes. I will be a fighter for progressive issues on the commission—as I've shown on the School Board and through my nonprofit— and ultimately, we want a Durham that takes care of its current residents while building a strong foundation for future generations; that means access to services and resources that Durham residents need to thrive.*

2. How can county government use its authority and its resources to direct jobs to those who most need them and to lift the wages of the lowest-paid workers in Durham?

*Advocating for an increase in the minimum wage would aid in assisting the lowest-wage workers. As of January 1, 2024 20 states increased the minimum wage. Unfortunately, North Carolina did not raise its minimum wages. In Durham, we need an economic development plan that closes the employment gap, provides a true living wage, supports healthy workplaces, employs local residents, and supports community members in obtaining affordable housing. There are three areas of focus that will support economic growth and workforce development:*

- *Graduation readiness includes fully funding education and creating conditions to attract and retain our educators. The county will have to leverage the schools to be innovative to support hiring local residents and our graduates when we ensure readiness is not overlooked.*
- *Supporting local, small businesses supports a local economy; studies have shown that local business owners are more likely to be connected to the community and support local workers' rights and advocacy.*
- *Corporate collaboration (i.e. - accountability) - re-imagined partnerships with large businesses coming to the area to better support employees, salaries, benefits, development, access to intellectual capital*

*We must focus on the comprehensive development plan with strategies to impact economic growth and attract businesses to Durham while maintaining our values of supporting local businesses who will support our community are key to economic growth and job creation. Further, our workers—including our young people and people living with disabilities— should thrive and be able to work in the city they live in, and live in the city they work in. A true living wage is just the beginning—high quality jobs where employees have access to benefits is critical.*

3. What issues do you see with school construction and student school assignment? What role should race equity play with regard to school construction and student assignment? Please address cost overruns that have reduced the reach of the last education bond.

*Our school construction and student school assignment planning process is long overdue for an update that truly supports the growing needs of our youth and community. Because of the large capital improvement projects that have to be prioritized, we need intentional processes to guide us when more immediate or emergency needs surface.. Additionally, inflation for the cost of goods and materials continues to adversely impact school construction, which further highlights the need for more intentional and collaborative planning*

*Fear of “white flight” led to original school assignment plans being made without equity in mind— which created re-segregation of our schools and challenges with access. Durham Public Schools are 80% students of color, so racial equity is a key factor in creating systems of support across every school with focus on closing the opportunity gap.*

*Finally, in regard to cost overruns, it is imperative that our administrator projections include unexpected costs across the entire system and account for inflation in the cost of goods.*

*I am a leader who cares for the children in our community and their families. With relentless effort, I will work to set our kids and our community up to thrive. This is why I formed my nonprofit, EPIC, to support Black families; it is why I advocated for policy changes through the Racial Equity Task Force; it is why I have served on the Board of Education, working for changes like the CROWN Act and Growing Together.*

4. What are your thoughts about the expansion of the HEART program to schools? How do you envision HEART interacting with the SRO program, both in terms of funding and within schools themselves?

*Community safety programs like HEART and diversion programs like our Mental Health Court are vital for keeping people with mental health needs out of our justice system and directly connected to the care they need. I am deeply interested in diversion programs, restorative programs, and reducing harm for our youth. My experience with public safety and mental health highlights my commitment:*

- *As the Chair of DCABP Education committee, I collaborated with the People's Alliance Education committee to improve the MOU (memorandum of understanding) with the sheriff's office to increase safety while reducing harm.*
- *As a school board member, I brought elected officials, including the sheriff to community conversations and strategies to increase public safety, including modifying the MOU*
- *As the school board liaison to the Safety and Wellness Taskforce (SWTF), I shared data from the Sheriff's office with the SWTF and shared support of their recommendations.*

*Based on my values and records, I emphatically support an increase for the HEART program to support evidenced based evaluation and then have a comprehensive study to determine how to scale it across the county and into the schools.*

*I am interested in supporting and implementing recommendations from the Community Safety and Wellness Task Force, which issued its report in October 2023. One of its recommendations is to revise the SRO Program, and I imagine HEART (and similar tools/programs) would be an effective complement to this revision. Youth mental health and safety has been a cornerstone of my leadership on the school board: I have been involved in the School Mental health Improvement Plan, and in May, my nonprofit hosted a workshop teaching parents and community members how to support the mental health needs of teens, including important mental health resources.*

5. Library staff have asked for an increased workforce, in part to support Sunday opening hours, but in the bigger picture, to enable one of the highest rated County services to fully function. As County Commissioner, how would you support, preserve, and grow the staff and programs of the library? How would you get input from library staff in the process of doing so?

*Enabling one of the highest rated County services to fully function is imperative to build upon the services that are supportive of residents and they feel empowered to utilize on a consistent basis. As a County Commissioner, my first step would be to collaborate with the library director and assistant director to assess the current workforce and provide recommendations to create an optimal solution for the employees and the public demand. As a compassionate leader, I would listen and appreciate the desire*

*for meeting employee needs while navigating a new normal after COVID while holding the community's needs with just as much care.*

*The truth is, libraries are not 'just' libraries— they are job centers, lifelines for young people (who have so few third spaces these days!), voting locations, event spaces, and places for neighbors to go during dangerous weather (such as serving as cooling centers during heat waves). Our community depends on libraries, and we are grateful to the workers who make them run- we want to support these free public spaces while helping the workers thrive too. If we want to expand our library, we absolutely need to expand staffing. As a former small business owner, I appreciate input from staff members, working collaboratively to find solutions, and keeping a culture that supports life work balance.*

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

6. What planning policies and priorities do you wish to see emerge from the on-going review and revision of Durham's Uniform Development Ordinance?

*Uniform Development Ordinance (UDO's) take time.UDO's not being readdressed in 30 years is similar to a comprehensive boundary reassignment not being addressed in 30 years at the school board level. It is understandable that we need to give projects and initiatives time to develop and unfold, but I believe a lesson learned is that we need regular updates and check-ins to ensure equity and systems change can occur to benefit our entire community.*

*It is critical that there be an on-going review and revision of UDO's at a regular cadence. We need to build capacity in the planning department to review and evaluate the ways in which the new ordinances are supportive but to also seek and be transparent about unintended consequences. As a previous business owner and current director of a nonprofit, I understand capacity building and would advocate that the new responsibilities required to give ongoing review and revision with fidelity must be done as a new position and not adding on to someone else's full plate.*

7. Should the County expand permanently supportive housing? What do you see as the role of PSH in community reentry? What other roles does it play?

*Permanently supportive housing (PSH) is all encompassing to help people re-integrate inclusive of seniors, veterans, those with mental illness, substance abuse, chronic homelessness, unhoused youth, immigrant populations, and justice involved. It is important for commissioners to make an effort to be helpful and prioritize budget needs to support our most vulnerable residents. Community reentry should support wraparound services within these communities and include housing, food, cultural integrations, language services, health concerns, etc. As a community care advocate with experience related to health and human services, I approach this topic with compassion, collaboration, and creative solutions to find a way to support our most vulnerable residents. Supporting efforts to give residents hope and stability is critical, especially if we want to address systemic issues like jobs, homelessness, recidivism, health, etc. These are intersecting systems that deserve support to address.*

### **County Finances, Transportation, Incentives, and Services**

8. What is your position on providing public incentives to private firms to promote economic development in Durham? How can county government use development incentives to promote more widely shared prosperity, including better jobs and higher wages for Durham residents?

*Jurisdictions who participate in the public incentive process better position themselves for job growth and economic prosperity. Durham County's longstanding practice has been always been to negotiate incentives, but the incentives are not actually awarded until the Corporate entity meets several thresholds on deliverables... ( i.e. Jobs, investment, etc) Therefore, the community doesn't give up anything without getting something.*

9. What non-traditional programs (such as public banking, community investment trusts, community development venture capital) could Durham County implement to reduce economic inequality in our community?

*Durham can continue supporting and highlighting existing programs that promote reducing economic inequality. For example, community credit unions such as the Cooperativa Latino Credit Union. Some of these loans are mortgage loans that some members would not have received at traditional banks. The Community Land Trustees (DCLT) is a community land trust that has allowed low and moderate income residents to buy and rent homes. Durham also has opportunity zones which encourage corporations to invest in disadvantaged communities zoned as opportunity zones. Opportunity zones can have a long term social impact. The benefits to investors are that they can postpone taxes on capital gains from other investors to postpone taxes on capital gains from investments and reduce their tax rate if they invest for more than ten years. A [2021 Duke study](#) found that in a study of seven zones in Durham County, opportunity zones will likely attract investors looking for market rate returns while also leading to longer term social impacts.*

*During my time on the City's Racial Equity Task Force, we highlighted the growing racial wealth gap and recommended that the city engage with local partners to create a Racial Equity Fund. This is something I would be interested in pursuing with the county commission: Communities of color would work with the county to undertake projects aimed at closing the racial wealth gap and enable the creation of wealth in communities of color over time. I'd like pipelines for leadership and entrepreneurship in communities of color. Ultimately, reducing economic inequality takes a systems approach. Stable, safe housing; access to benefits and a living wage— these are all cornerstones of my leadership.*

10. What should be the principal components of a new public transit plan for Durham County?

*I believe that our county must have transportation equity at the foundation of its transit plan, meaning that everyone can navigate the county, regardless of income. We must expand transportation options to be available to all residents! My vision for a new public transit plan for Durham County would help shift us away from being so automobile-dependent. The average Durham resident drives at least 20,000 miles per year, forcing us to spend thousands per year on transportation, and increasing our carbon footprint. Unfortunately, many of us have no choice but to use a car to get where we need to go. A new plan should reduce Durham's dependence on cars, by emphasizing public transportation. Ultimately, we need a high quality regional bus rapid transit system that connects to jobs, housing, and services. Additionally, I would like to improve bus stop accessibility as well as paratransit.*

*Further, while Bike Durham's Vision Zero has mostly advocated at the city level, I believe it offers the county commission a critically different approach to thinking about our transportation system: improving*

*our roadway environment to reduce speeding and fatalities; meaningful cross-disciplinary collaboration; addressing safety mobility. Currently, Durham County does not have a sidewalk maintenance or construction program (the City of Durham maintains sidewalks within city limits), which may be a possible area of growth. I believe we can have safe and accessible transit options in a more pedestrian-friendly, bikeable Durham. I support a Green New Deal for Durham, and although it would touch so many of the arenas shared in this questionnaire, it feels especially important to mention while talking about transportation.*

*Transit, housing, and land use are inextricably interconnected. We must continue the effort to address them together!*

11. What, if anything, should the county do to distribute the property tax burden with greater equity and fairness?

*Property tax appraisal and evaluation is critical in governance and being able to make budget projections with the knowledge of revenue streams. It is equally important that a progressive city like Durham who desires growth and economic development consider unintended consequences in order to minimize the impacts of gentrification on long standing residents. One of the initial ways to create greater equity and fairness is to get an updated appraisal of all Durham properties. I believe the pandemic has created delays and reprioritizing these appraisals will be critical.*

*Also, we need to consider programs to ensure equity in supporting our current long-time residents during the property tax appraisals, such as the Homeowner Repair Program which helps residents adapt their homes to age in place, address critical repairs, and offset funds for property taxes. Likewise, the Low-Income Tax Relief program that is provided through the Department of Social Services and funded by the city and county, which provides property tax assistance to low and fixed income Durham residents.. My priority is keeping people in their homes!*

## **Justice and Law Enforcement**

12. Explain how you see the County's role in overseeing the Durham jail. Under what circumstances, if any, should the county take intervening action to improve the lives of incarcerated individuals?

*The County's role in overseeing the Durham jail is complex but important. Ultimately, budgets are moral documents, and how we fund the Sheriff's Department (and related budget lines) is representative of this— like the county funding the new youth detention center. It is the County's job to ensure the Sheriff is transparent about his budget, that incarcerated people have enough resources, and that we continue to understand how systems are interacting so we can best direct our efforts and resources to support our residents.*

*Part of our role in overseeing the jail is working to reduce interactions with law enforcement and provide resources that contribute to avoiding jail time. We are lucky for the wealth of community advocacy that is helping us imagine a Durham that is more just and free; the Human Relations Commission, Racial Equity Task Force, and Community Safety and Wellness Task Force are just a few who have issued recommendations the County should consider.*

*Incidentally, our intervening action doesn't end when folks are no longer incarcerated. The Excel guaranteed income program in Durham is a good example of our responsibility to provide resources and*

*wraparound services to our residents, including a safety net. We should also continue investing and expanding anti-recidivism and diversion programs, doing our best to ensure people do not leave Durham's jail more worse off than how they entered.*

13. What is your position on expanding the HEART program to be county-wide, fully staffed, and available 24/7? Which of those are your top priorities? How would you work to overcome resistance to HEART from some in law enforcement?

*I support the HEART program being expanded; it is a model program that other cities are interested in utilizing, for good reason: our residents deserve this access to skilled and compassionate care in crisis. To ensure the sustainability of this high quality care, my focus would be on increasing funding to make it fully staffed to ensure it can meet the challenges of operating 24/7. The presentations to the city on expanding HEART have been strategic and well thought out; I would be interested in following their priorities for the order of these three positions to ensure HEART is able to sustain its current success, but I can state unequivocally that my position for these expansions is fully supportive.*

*The way to overcome resistance to HEART from some in law enforcement is to simply have the conversation. Communication is key to any effective partnership. Addressing the vacant positions in the police and sheriff office is key to showing a need for support. HEART can address those needs to some degree. Also, listening to solutions from those who are in opposition is key to showing understanding and a willingness to seek a broad perspective of solutions. Undoubtedly, there are times when there will be difficult conversations and disagreements on the way forward, but if we use data, facts, and resources to inform the decisions being made by elected officials and bring people along the way, the end result will be that people should feel heard and reassured that we are working towards the same goal for a prosperous and safe city.*

### **Health Care and Social Services**

14. As profiled recently in a 3-part Assembly/WBTV series, Durham County has the second-slowest reunification rate in the state for children in foster care. As a County Commissioner, what steps would you propose to help families thrive in Durham County and prevent involuntary family separation?

*Families that experience involuntary family separation need resources that lead to healing and restoration and stability. Many families that become involved with the child welfare system are experiencing issues stemming from chronic stress due to mental health concerns, substance use disorders, food insecurities, domestic violence, under employment and housing issues. Services and resources to address and combat the precipitating issues above are critical to improving the reunification rate for families in Durham County. To thrive, families need safe, affordable housing; a true living wage with benefits; transportation; access to health care and services; a high quality public education- just for starters.*

*To prevent involuntary family separation, I am interested in utilizing recommendations from a 2022 report from Emancipate NC; like stated above, they cite that Durham must offer ample resources to biological families in order to keep children safe with their parents. Hiring practices are also key; in 2023, the Department of Social Services brought on new leadership, and it should be essential that key leaders support our goals of avoiding separation and achieving prompt reunification. Ultimately, kids need to be*

*supported in their families when possible, not resourced outside their families, and the reunification rate is telling that we need to do more to help our families and combat involuntary family separation.*

15. What do you think about the balance between confidentiality and transparency related to families impacted by involuntary separation in the foster care system? Should these courtrooms be open to the public? What should Durham parents do if they feel their child has been wrongfully taken from them? Would you meet with and listen to a parent in this situation?

*When considering the balance between confidentiality, transparency, and courtroom policies, I have to begin with the research behind current systems and the authority of county commissioners. Generally reflecting, I would land along the following lines of thinking:*

- *Laws governing confidentiality are set by state mandate.*
- *Transparency is guided by parents and legal counsel.*
- *Court rooms are typically open for general business in which Judges have discretion in closing courtrooms. If requests are submitted by counsel to close the courtroom and/or due to the nature of the allegations of the cases when being heard.*

*Based on these facts, we need to operate within the law regarding confidentiality and I agree with that. Regarding transparency, it has to be the decision of the family to share their story but as a governing body, I would want to know how we can balance transparency about our department while keeping the family's confidence.*

*Parents who feel mistreated or understood by CPS should reach out to supervisors, managers, directors at DSS. They can also consult counsel. If children have already been removed. Parents are given court appointed Family Court representation. Parents should advocate for their family within the system and participate in good faith.*

*In regards to meeting with and listening to a parent, I would personally want to as I am a compassionate advocate with a history of centering the voices of those closest impacted to a situation to be heard. However, I would be mindful of my role of governance and accountability. However, people need to feel heard, so I would be curious about doing some focus groups or listening sessions that do not impact a particular case but give support to improving services.*

## **Civil Rights**

16. What are the principal issues facing the Latinx and immigrant communities in Durham and how should the county address them?

*The Latinx community has always been a vital part of Durham's diversity. Durham has a history of being a place of sanctuary for immigrant communities, which is something we should always maintain and be proud of. I envision a county where Latinx and immigrants can not only live in Durham, but thrive here.*

*Principal issues facing the Latinx and immigrant communities in Durham include safety, housing, and language access. Recently, Durham law enforcement [issued warnings](#) about robberies targeting Latinx-owned businesses in the Lakewood community. However, people did not feel comfortable calling for help due to their immigrant status. According to someone interviewed from El Centro, "I think at this point we need more [law enforcement] who speak Spanish. People who can support us so our community can ask for support that way." More bilingual 911 dispatchers would be a great resource for Durham.*



Also, [data on rental evictions](#) has started to increase in Durham for the first time since the pandemic started in 2020, which is especially concerning with immigrant communities that more often deal with predatory landlords. Investments in Legal Aid's eviction diversion program have been a valuable resource to defend against evictions. Lastly, the county should always make it a priority to expand language access, especially for any service, program, or opportunity that Durham provides.

17. At a time when the LGBTQ community is under attack by the NC legislature, what can the County do to provide as much protection to this community as possible?

*Durham has a history of protecting the diversity in our community and this also aligns with my values. However, at times it feels that the county government has been neutral, and possibly waiting for specific direction. Specifically, as it relates to diversity and equity, we should give the county's Director of Equitable Wellbeing the time needed to introduce equity throughout the fabric of county government in each department. As we engage the community, we need to collaborate with the LGBTQIA+ Center in Durham, those closest to the impact of discrimination and inequities to hear their concerns and shape policy to protect our community. As a county commissioner, we should constantly reaffirm our commitment to equality by affirming, recognizing, and being inclusive in our programs and policies. We should also look to build relationships and show acceptance and understanding through practices as simple as pronouns in our communications. As I have given guidance to our Durham Public School administrators, we need to make sure our policies have gender neutral terms. We really need to be honest with ourselves as we are about those who work for us and those receiving services that we are not causing harm but are being inclusive and equal.*

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

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