

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.

Candidate's name: Stephen J. Valentine

Address: 1115 Golden Crest Drive Durham, North Carolina 27704

Email Address: [ValentineSJ1969@gmail.com](mailto:ValentineSJ1969@gmail.com)

Phone: 919-323-1108

Website: <https://www.votevalentinefordurhamcountycommissioner.com>

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?

**The single most critical issue facing Durham County is the issue of Affordable housing. We say we value affordable housing, but it is increasingly difficult to square our stated values with the realities across Durham County. First, most development projects that include acceptable affordable housing provisions are steered primarily toward Northern Durham instead of it being a shared commitment across the County. The unintended consequence of these business decisions is twofold. First, it displaces residents from their communities i.e., gentrification and segregates large numbers of residents on the basis of race and class. Providing affordable housing options should not move us forward to the past. Development projects that include good faith affordable housing provisions across the county would aid in solving this problem so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past and make our city a destination for only those in a certain socioeconomic class.**

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?

**The county government can use its authority to create an environment that attracts businesses to Durham who are committed to direct jobs to those who need them. For example, the county has successfully created partnerships with companies like Catalent, E.I. Lilly, and Kempower who have committed to creating large numbers of jobs for high school graduates and graduates of Durham County Community College certificate programs. The county can also use its considerable resources to incentivize companies by offering tax credits to companies who commit to paying workers a living wage and being good corporate stewards in our community. Good stewardship includes investing in workers and giving back to the community.**

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.

**School construction and student school assignments are inextricably linked because the location of construction determines which students will attend a particular school. Coincidentally, racial makeup schools will also be impacted based on where schools are constructed because of the racial makeup in communities.**

**The cost overruns that have reduced the reach of the last education bond will be a challenge for the County in the coming years. The construction scheduled to build the Durham School of the Arts (DSA) will subsume most of the funds leaving the county to delay most of the much-needed repairs to the other schools that have been identified under the bond. Underestimating the cost of projects from the beginning is a widespread problem across the country, which means we need to do a better job of ensuring project estimates are close to accurate. Also, unforeseeable circumstances may have played a part in these particular cost overruns and the County Commissioner's may have to decide to increase taxes in order pay for these overruns.**

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?

**Let me begin by saying that I support the HEART Program unequivocally because it is an example of how mental health teams are utilized to support our community in ways that police are unequipped to manage i.e., a mental health crisis. If we extend the Heart Program to schools, it should be to support families in the community. The larger issue of accountability for the County Commission is whether we are adequately funding schools to meet the mental health needs of our children presently. Our schools employ social workers, school counselors, psychologists, and nurses so why not ensure the national recommended ratios per student are met for each professional discipline. For example, The School Social Worker Association of America recommends one social worker for every 250 students in schools. DPS has approximately one social worker for every 902 students. In fact, we are**

**not meeting any of the recommended rations in any of the professional areas critical to student needs so I think we should focus on giving our schools additional resources within the existing structure.**

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?

**First let me say that I support the library staff and their request to increase the workforce in order to operate on Sunday. It is incomprehensible to me that such a valued service to our community is repeatedly overlooked with respect to its personnel shortages. I personally use the libraries here in Durham and have taken the language training courses they provide, which I believe are a value added in a multilingual community. As a County Commissioner I would make it a priority to support, preserve, and grow the staff and its programs because it is a benefit to the entire community—everyone has access to the library. Also, an essential component on the way forward on this issue must start with surveying the staff on this issue.**

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?

**It is my hope that the notice requirements of section 3.2.5 of the Uniform Development Ordinance (UDO) be expanded to include more notice to residents. For example, in the community where I live in North Durham only several residents of the 1,386 residents that make up the community actually received notice on a major commercial project that will impact every resident of our subdivision. It is my hope that we change this rule to include more residents in the notice requirement with the goal of increasing engagement. Residents are not against development they want to apart of the process to ensure communities are not just left holding the bag once the developers have moved on.**

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

**I believe the County can expand permanently supportive housing through public/private partnerships. We will always have a societal need to support vulnerable populations and we have a social responsibility to provide affordable housing as a basic human right to veterans, those suffering mental illness, substance abuse or other disabling conditions. I most certainly include the former incarcerated attempting reentry into society as a vulnerable population as well. Permanently supportive housing also creates environments for people to self-actualize, learn new skills, find jobs, and become good citizens.**

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?

**Providing public incentives to private firms to promote economic development is an essential tool in our collective toolbox in Durham County. I had mentioned that the county can also use its considerable resources to incentivize companies by offering tax credits to companies who commit to paying workers a living wage and being good corporate stewards in our community.**

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?

**If you want to reduce economic inequality in our community enhance universal pre-K to support families, maintain livable wages, implement the new Medicaid expansion, promote full employment, and end structural racial and gender discriminatory practices.**

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

**The new Durham County Transit Plan was approved in 2023 with the goals of accessibility, connectivity, convenience, and sustainability.**

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

**It might be time for us to take a look at our Higher Education Institutions in our county who receive tax exempt status as 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit organizations and have large endowments to help alleviate the property tax burden. In other localities large institutions like Yale and the University of Pennsylvania have contributed to local school systems and public services in lieu of property tax. It is at least worth starting the discussion.**

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?

**I see the County as playing an oversight role in ensuring those who are incarcerated are treated with dignity and respect. Under the leadership of Sheriff Birkhead, the Durham County Detention Facility already offers educational and vocational programs, work detail and substance abuse treatment, among other services and activities. And I think we should always be open to programming that improves the lives of the incarcerated to reduce recidivism.**

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 am in support of expanding the HEART program county-wide, fully staffed, and available 24/7. The priority would have to be to fully staff the program, so you do not undermine its effectiveness. One anecdotal criticism of the HEART pilot program initially**

**was that there were not enough workers available to meet the demand. Also, without a fully staffed program you run the risk of burn out among staff by making them available 24/7.**

**I am not so sure that there is resistance to HEART from law enforcement. The data shows that community response teams (CRT) responded to 3215 incidents in the community that would otherwise require a police response, 2816 calls were managed directly by crisis call counselors, and 1820 incidents included clinicians who were paired with police between June 2022 and October 2023.[www.durhamnc.gov/HEART-data](http://www.durhamnc.gov/HEART-data).**

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?

**As a former child protective service worker and administrator of the Army Family Advocacy Program at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, I understand the complexities involved in reunification for children in foster care so I would not be alarmed by a profiled series on the news. Because the safety of children is involved, a one size fits all approach to reunification is not in the best interest of children so in some instances it may require more time for a successful reunification to happen. Most successful reunifications never make news, but bad outcomes do.**

**Families thrive when parents have jobs in order to take care of their children and they have time to invest in their children's lives in a socially integrative way. Also, seeking individual and family counseling when you need it would be a way to prevent 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?

**There is an emerging opinion that the best interest of the child is no longer best protected by having proceedings related to involuntary separation outside the purview of the general public. However, I am still influenced by my training and experience on this issue which informs my thoughts and as result I maintain that these types of cases should not be open to the public to protect the interest of children.**

**If a parent feels their child has been wrongfully taken from them, they should seek legal counsel. If they are unable to afford legal counsel, I would refer them to the NCCU School of Law who is equipped through its legal clinic to assist these parents or refer them to other resources in the community able to assist.**

**I would speak to any constituent on matters of public concern.**

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

**The Latinx and immigrant communities in Durham face many of the same issues as other vulnerable populations across the County including language and cultural differences. But difference is really the untold American story and if history has taught us anything we all lose when the definition of “we” is not inclusive enough to include our neighbor despite where they are from, there immigration status, or their language. We all want the same thing!**

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?

**I think all of us have a responsibility to protect the most vulnerable members of our community, particularly the LGBTQIA+ community. As individuals we should be promoting inclusion and acceptance based on respecting the dignity and worth of every individual. I have made a commitment both personally and professionally to live my life by that guiding principle. The County Commission as a governing body also has a responsibility to protect the LGBTQIA+ community by creating an environment of inclusivity through programming, training, and policy development. In the area of policy development, we should be working in partnership with members of the LGBTQIA+ community to continue breaking down structural barriers to full equality in our society.**