

Samaria McKenzie

1. My vision for Durham centers on building a community that prioritizes people over profit and provides tangible benefits to its residents. Through conversations with neighbors and firsthand experience living in Durham, I've identified four key priorities for our city: minimizing corporate government contracts to return buying power to the people, protecting and strengthening tenants' rights, addressing crime-bred addiction among unhoused communities, and investing in low-income neighborhoods. These priorities are actionable within the scope of city council authority and reflect the real, immediate needs of our community as I've witnessed them. While these are the foundation of my platform, they are not the extent of my vision—I remain committed to listening and adapting as needs evolve to better serve all of Durham.

Minimizing corporate government contracts to give buying power back to the people

This addresses the rise of unaffordable condos, housing, and corporate developments that displace too many Durham residents and prevent young adults from gaining equity through homeownership

Protecting and strengthening Tenants' Rights

This addresses slumlords who profit off low-income families while neglecting necessary repairs and living conditions, and compels absentee investment property owners to restore their abandoned and uninhabited houses

Combating crime-bred addiction in unhoused communities

This addresses the unfortunate increase in our unhoused neighbors, contributing to local crime through vulture drug dealers who prey on and sell within their own neighborhoods, causing broader community safety concerns

Investing in low-income neighborhoods through repairing sidewalks, roads and public parks

This addresses years of neglect in low-income neighborhoods, ensuring they get the repairs and resources they deserve

2. I cannot determine whether or not I am the right person- only the residents of Durham can make that decision. What I can tell them is that my integrity is

unwavering. When voting on policies, contracts, or grants that either harm Durham residents, drain our resources, or enrich resource hoarders, I will always vote no and when something benefits the average Durham resident, I will vote yes. I am not asking for donations, and I encourage every Durham resident to ask why any other candidate would be. It's because they lack integrity. I would never ask the people I'm running to represent to pay me to win. That same attitude of integrity will guide me in office, where I will be relentless in standing up for our values and protecting the integrity of Bull City.

3. As an elected city council member, my priority is the people of Durham and representing them and their needs accurately. That should be the only priority of the members in this council. I am not concerned about the relationship between myself and other council members; as long as we all are centering the people of Durham, all efforts will be collaborative and proactive.
4. As a marketing and Digital Media Director, I have over a decade of professional experience in budget setting and allocation and managing budgets worth millions of dollars daily. My success comes from one fundamental approach: I will not touch, allocate, or set a single budget without first understanding our goals and objectives, identifying the target audience, defining the time frame and timeline, and determining the resources needed to accomplish our goals. This strategy has allowed me to help companies generate millions monthly, and I will bring the same rigorous and goal-oriented approach to budgeting for Bull City.
5. Durham must prioritize preserving our natural green spaces, especially our trees, which are essential for clean air circulation, providing shade, and keeping neighborhoods cool. Approving policies that allow more trees to be mowed down for development not only increases pollution from construction and added population density but also strips away the natural benefits trees provide. Protecting our environment starts with protecting what already sustains us.

I will prioritize saying no to policies that destroy green spaces, particularly trees, since they provide clean air, shade, and cooling that directly counter climate impacts. I will also push for policies requiring businesses to recycle, enforcing fines for non-compliance, and ensure waste education so residents have the tools they need, like access to recycling bins.

6. I will vote for full or partial funding for programs that are proven to work. I will not support anything blindly or on the hope that it might succeed. I will ensure Durham's money is spent responsibly, and any investment in these types of programs must demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness.

7. As an elected official, it's my responsibility to accurately represent Durham residents. To measure equity, I will review voting outcomes- specifically the number of people voting in a demographic versus those eligible to assess representation. Additionally, I'll track unemployment rates, unhoused rates, and wages within underserved populations to evaluate if policies are effectively benefiting them. City Council can impact these indicators by staying true to our commitments, prioritizing my four main objectives: minimizing corporate contracts, strengthening tenant rights, addressing unhoused community issues, and investing in low-income neighborhoods—and actively consulting residents for guidance on new initiatives.
8. Understaffing is the most important issue that Durham systems face. We have systems and organizations in place to serve the people, but they are understaffed. I am not willing to raise taxes for Durham residents to address this concern. Instead, I will audit current spending, evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies, contracts, grants etc. and appropriately reallocate the budget.
9. As mentioned in my previous response, the Durham Police Department is understaffed, particularly the first responders and 911 operation system. Durham residents are waiting too long for emergency responses, and by the time help arrives, criminals often escape accountability, perpetuating crime cycles. I will not add to the police department's budget without fully investigating how current funds are being allocated and identifying where they should be placed. This decision will rely on analyzing financial documents, staffing data, and operational records.
10. Since we cannot implement rent caps in North Carolina, my plan for affordable housing focuses on stopping the unchecked development of condos and apartments that drive up housing costs. As a city council member, I will work to put limits on such developments and hold both landlords and the city accountable through policies that strengthen tenant protections. This approach aligns with my broader goal of minimizing corporate government contracts and prioritizing the needs of Durham residents.
11. When deciding whether to approve or deny zoning requests, I will prioritize transparency and accountability. I will evaluate how the development plan aligns with Durham's needs, like expanding affordable housing, enhancing public spaces, or improving infrastructure in underserved areas. Additionally, I will consider how the zoning request impacts residents' quality of life and whether it

disproportionately affects vulnerable communities. My decisions will always follow state regulations and focus on protecting the interests of everyday Durham residents rather than promoting unchecked corporate development.

12. I'll need to continue research to provide a thorough analysis of Durham's municipal bonds over the past few years. For now, I'll prioritize understanding how these bonds have been allocated and whether they've effectively addressed the needs of Durham's residents, particularly concerning infrastructure and underserved communities.
13. The city can play a vital role in defending vulnerable populations by enacting local protections that counter oppressive federal and state policies. This includes strengthening anti-discrimination ordinances, ensuring resources for LGBTQI and immigrant communities like legal aid or sanctuary policies, and creating safe spaces within public programs and facilities. Additionally, as a city council member, I will work to amplify the voices of these communities, ensuring they are heard in policymaking and protected within Durham's governance.
14. State and federal preemption limits the powers of local governments, often restricting our ability to implement certain policies, like rent caps or corporate regulations. While my platform focuses on minimizing corporate contracts, strengthening tenant rights, and investing in low-income neighborhoods, some areas—like landlord accountability—might face preemption barriers. To overcome these, I will utilize local ordinances within allowable boundaries and collaborate with state representatives to advocate for more municipal flexibility. My commitment is to creatively and legally prioritize residents' needs despite these challenges.
15. When faced with conflicting views, my approach mirrors my budgeting strategy: we must first solidify shared goals. No decision should be made without alignment on these goals. If something does not align with these priorities, it is removed from the conversation. If it does align, it becomes part of the discussion and moves forward. This allows for us to focus solely on our confirm objectives.
16. We need to allocate more funding to Durham Public Schools to support programs like aftercare for all. Simple as that. Without proper funding, these programs can't happen, and families won't get the support they need.
17. I've lived in Durham for over a decade, and in my current neighborhood for three years. During that time, I've done the work to make it safer for children to walk and bike to school. I pushed for and secured sidewalk repairs, worked with local

police to improve safety and address community concerns, and held absentee landlords accountable for repairing neglected properties. My efforts not only cleaned up the neighborhood but revealed just how many kids live here, and now they can walk the streets safely thanks to this collective and intentional work. I will bring that approach to the whole of Durham County.