

PA PAC Questionnaire for Durham City Council Ward Seats and Durham Mayor – 2025

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 Monday July 28 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 Board at

pac@peoplesalliancepac.org by **July 28 at 5pm**

Please use subject line ‘PA ENDORSEMENT 2025’

Please note that following the Monday July 28 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. ***Please use subject line ‘PA ENDORSEMENT 2025’ when emailing your completed questionnaire to***

pac@peoplesalliancepac.org

Candidate’s name: Shanetta Burris

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1. What is your vision for the Durham community, and what are the specific policies you would prioritize during your term to move us towards that vision?

I envision creating a Durham where all people can thrive regardless of race, socio-economic background, and gender. I am running for City Council to bring another responsive voice to city leadership. As a candidate, I believe in transparency, accountability, and community involvement. Together, we can make Durham a better place for everyone.

- **Community Safety:** Collaborating to develop comprehensive solutions that tackle the root causes of crime in our community.
- **Housing Affordability:** Promoting neighborhood stability and creating pathways to homeownership for low- and middle-income individuals and families.
- **City Infrastructure and the Environment:** Taking environmental impacts into account as we continue to expand the city, while also ensuring residents have access to essential city services.

2. Why are you the right person to elect at this moment to guide our city over the coming years?

I have over a decade of experience in grassroots advocacy, issue-based community organizing, and electoral politics. Throughout my educational, professional, and volunteer experiences, I have had the opportunity to collaborate with community members from diverse backgrounds, including various races, genders, religions, educational levels, and socioeconomic statuses.

I have served in several key roles, including Associate Organizer with Durham CAN, Organizing Director for North Carolina with America Votes, Senior State Organizing Manager with the Black Voters Matter Fund, and Program Manager at Lillian's List. In these roles, I have focused on coalition building, budget management, and drafting and implementing large-scale programs. At Durham CAN, I specifically worked with leaders from Durham's legacy neighborhoods, elected officials, and city staff to tackle issues related to affordable housing, crime, and the improvement of public recreational spaces. Currently, I am employed as a Training Manager at Supermajority, an organization dedicated to empowering women as the most influential voting bloc in the country.

I believe my lived experiences will provide a unique and important perspective to the Durham City Council. I possess a deep understanding of policy creation, implementation, and evaluation, which is essential for effectively addressing the issues that impact the quality of life for all residents of Durham.

3. In your view, how do interactions among council members influence the larger health of

Durham's policy and political environment? As a council member, how would you seek to contribute to the council's culture? If you are running for mayor, how would your leadership influence the council's culture?

Interactions among council members influence the larger health of Durham's policy and political environment. To strengthen relationships between council members, I will prioritize the golden rule, "treat others as you want to be treated." I believe that council members should operate in a space where they do not make assumptions about an individual's temperament or qualifications based on gender, religion, sexuality, or race. Moreover, members of the council should offer grace to those they encounter and allow them to present themselves as their whole selves. No one should have to diminish who they are to appease others. We all have our own lived experience which undoubtedly has framed how we view the world. For the council to be effective, members must always respect their colleagues, regardless of political or ideological differences. Diversity in thought should not serve as an impediment to good governance.

4. Building and approving an annual budget for our community is one of the most important acts of governance that city council members undertake each year. If you currently serve on the City Council, what informed your approach to the budget process and your ultimate decision to vote for it? If you are not currently on council, how would you have voted on the budget and what would have informed your approach and decision?

I am an avid believer that our city's budget is a reflection of our priorities. One of the council's goals is to create an environment conducive to shared economic prosperity. In this year's budget, I was glad to see that the minimum wage for city employees was raised from \$19.58 to \$21.90 per hour. However, according to [MIT's liveable wage calculator](#), the living wage for one adult with no children in Durham County is \$25.55, so I believe we must continue to take steps to raise wages for City workers. I have heard countless stories from city employees who have had to seek housing outside the city due to housing affordability issues.

A significant highlight in the budget is the decision to keep GoDurham buses fare-free until June 2026. This is essential as we consider the individuals who rely on our bus services. Additionally, it reflects our commitment to proactively reduce pollution and protect our environment.

Although the budget was approved before the flooding that many of our neighbors experienced, I believe that as the city continues to grow, we should increase our investment in capital improvements. We should specifically focus on flood reduction and stormwater improvements, particularly for those neighbors who are at the greatest risk.

In summary, due to statutory obligations, I would have supported the final budget. However, I think more could have been done to find a compromise rather than the display of an “all or nothing” strategy.

5. From smoky skies to extreme heat to heavy rainfall events, Durham is already experiencing the effects of climate change – and the most vulnerable people in our communities (including children, the elderly, low-income residents, unhoused residents, and BIPOC folks) are being impacted the most. What policies will you prioritize to reduce climate pollution and help Durham adapt to worsening impacts?

To reduce climate pollution and help Durham adapt to the worsening impacts of climate change, especially for the most vulnerable in our community, I would prioritize efforts to:

1. Direct resources to economically disadvantaged communities that have often suffered from environmental injustices.
 2. Address water management concerns to reduce flooding risks, especially in the area around the Eno River that experienced unprecedented flooding just weeks ago.
 3. Further investigate and support the use of renewable energy sources
 4. Increase energy efficiency in city buildings and homes
 5. Enhance public transit options to reduce carbon emissions, with a focus on exploring Bus Rapid Transit and other regional transit solutions.
 6. Preserve green spaces that act as natural environmental filters and provide areas for community recreation and enjoyment.
 7. Evaluate and make improvements to waste management and recycling.
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6. Would you be willing to vote for a city contribution to partially fund an expansion of the HEART program into Durham Public Schools? More broadly, how is Durham doing in its approach to community safety, and what if anything would you change?

Yes, I would be willing to vote for a city contribution to expand HEART. However, we must also ensure that our 911 call centers are adequately funded, as many Durham residents report long wait times when they call 911 for serious emergencies.

To address community safety, we must prioritize the basic needs of people and address the root causes of crime, ensuring all residents have a decent quality of life. As we hear more and more stories about gun violence and young people bringing weapons to school, we must be open and honest to understand why this is happening and find solutions. That means understanding there are different reasons why these events are occurring, which means reaching into our collective toolboxes to implement a variety of solutions. No one solution alone will make Durham residents safe.

While we work to improve community safety, we must also be vigilant to prevent

over-policing and profiling based on race or ethnicity.

7. How does equity – including racial equity and equitable services for immigrants and refugees – play into your view of governance? What metrics or indicators would you look to to know whether Durham is achieving more equitable outcomes for underserved populations over time? What do you see as the main policy levers that City Council can use to impact those indicators?

Durham City Council must prioritize racial equity and ensure that immigrants and refugees receive equitable services in our decision-making. To assess whether Durham is achieving fair outcomes for underserved populations over time, the Council can examine various metrics, such as income and wealth disparities, the availability and affordability of housing for disadvantaged communities, accessibility and costs of public transit, and investments in skill-building programs. As I've mentioned before, I believe our city's budget reflects our priorities.

8. What is the most important thing that is not currently being funded by the City? Would you be willing to raise taxes to fund this item?

The city has allocated \$7 million for the remediation of contaminated parks in the fiscal year 2025-2026, increasing the total investment to \$12 million. However, I believe the city should invest more to address this critical issue. The presence of lead in our parks poses a significant public health concern, and the city must act urgently to mitigate potential harm to residents. This effort should include funding a comprehensive community health and education program, conducting a risk assessment, and developing a plan for risk reduction. I am confident that the proposed solutions will not create an additional tax burden for our residents; it is about how we allocate existing funds during the budget process.

9. Are you satisfied with the Durham Police Department, including its administrative, law enforcement, and security functions? Should the City government increase or decrease resources allocated to the Police Department? Please explain your answer.

There is room for improvement within the operations and functioning of multiple city departments. I believe that the Durham City Council should provide the Durham Police Department with support to address the department's staffing shortages. Data from the end of 2024 reveals that [28%](#) of positions within the department are vacant. This vacancy rate presents a risk for officers and residents of Durham. The increase in response times for low priority calls can be attributed to the staffing shortage. While the DPD is taking necessary steps to address the staffing shortage, the community at-large should think about how the behaviors and attitudes toward law enforcement may serve as an impediment in the department's ability to hire, train, and retain quality candidates. Moreover, I believe that decisions regarding the support of our police department

shouldn't be made in a silo. The voices of residents who are critically impacted by gun violence and violent crime should be centered.

10. Please detail your plan for affordable housing in Durham, including a discussion of current programs here in Durham and other programs across the state that have been effective in maintaining and creating affordability.

Durham's rapid growth has intensified our housing crisis, displacing long-time residents and creating a gap between housing demand and affordability. I'm committed to sustainable, inclusive solutions that serve both new arrivals and long-standing community members. Programs like Forever Home, Durham have made important strides by investing in housing for low- to moderate-income residents, but we must go further. That means setting higher annual targets and scaling up from small projects to meet the real scope of our city's needs.

We can implement innovative strategies to achieve this goal. Revolving construction loans dedicated to equitable housing development would provide accessible financing and speed up production. We can also invest in converting older rental properties into affordable housing units, thereby maximizing what already exists. For residents who still face financial barriers, universal housing vouchers can provide vital support, ensuring they have access to safe and stable homes. Beyond building housing, we must protect communities and help residents, especially Black families who have been disproportionately impacted, build generational wealth. Gentrification often increases property taxes, putting elderly residents on fixed incomes at risk of financial hardship. By partnering with banks and credit unions to provide low-interest loans, we can help offset those rising costs. For younger residents and working families, we need a more comprehensive approach that includes job training, small business support, and wealth-building tools such as matched savings accounts.

Addressing Durham's housing crisis demands bold action and collaboration. By working together—residents, public leaders, and private partners—we can protect what makes Durham home and ensure it remains a place where everyone can thrive.

11. Describe your decision making process in voting to approve or not approve zoning requests. In particular, what do you look for in a development plan that leads you to vote for it or against it? In your answer, please take into consideration state restrictions on the power of cities to regulate development.

When approving zoning requests it is important to consider the type of housing the development will generate. Over recent years, Durham has moved to encourage density building as a means of addressing the perceived housing shortage. When considering zoning changes or annexations, it is essential to determine whether these changes align with the city's comprehensive plan. Another consideration is studying how the development will impact the existing neighborhood. Community members must be sufficiently engaged by developers during the planning process to ensure that their

issues or concerns are adequately addressed. Community engagement does not have to be a contentious process. In recent years, some developers have offered proffers that supported the purchase of new fire trucks and the building of EMS stations. In reviewing decisions related to zoning and annexation, I will examine if our current infrastructure supports the future population. Finally, environmental considerations will also be factored into decisions made around zoning requests.

12. Please provide your analysis of Durham's municipal bonds over the past few years.

In November 2024, voters in Durham approved two municipal bonds that will allow the city to borrow up to \$200 million for improvements to streets, sidewalks, and parks. While it is common for local governments to use bonds to finance infrastructure upgrades, it is important to note that these borrowed funds will also affect the city's property tax rate.

13. Many vulnerable populations in our city are under attack from both the federal government and the state legislature. This includes LGBTQI people and immigrants, among others. What role can the city play in countering these attacks?

It is well-known that the Trump administration has made significant rollbacks to protections for LGBTQIA+ individuals through executive actions and cuts to funding for critical services. In 2025, the administration ordered the termination of the National LGBTQ+ Youth Suicide Lifeline, effective July 17, 2025. To address this gap, the City can continue funding organizations within our community through the Durham Youth Leadership Fund (DYLF). This program has provided grant funding to organizations like the LGBTQ Center of Durham and QCHEX, which offer vital mental health support specifically for LGBTQIA+ youth. Furthermore, as our immigrant communities continue to face harmful attacks resulting from the current presidential administration, it is crucial for our city to maintain and strengthen partnerships with organizations like CWS Durham. Their mission is to welcome refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers from around the globe, providing them with lives filled with freedom, hope, and opportunities through direct services, advocacy, leadership development, and relationship building within our community.

14. Please describe your understanding of the role of state and federal preemption on local government. Are there any parts of your platform that might run up against preemptions? If so, please explain how you would overcome such obstacles.

North Carolina operates under Dillon's Rule, which means that local governments can only exercise powers specifically granted by the state legislature, the General Assembly. As a result, the North Carolina General Assembly has the authority to override or limit local ordinances and decisions, particularly in areas such as housing, environmental

policy, labor regulations, and other related matters. Additionally, federal law can supersede conflicting state or local laws. My campaign platform has taken these challenges into account, and there are no aspects of my platform that would clash with existing preemptions.

15. What guides your decision making process when presented with contradictory views? For example, when advice from city staff contradicts advice from advisory committees (such as the Planning Commission and others), and residents present multiple and conflicting opinions, how do you reach your decisions on how to vote?

I am an exhaustive analytical thinker. I prefer to make decisions based on fact and data rather than emotion. All information (regardless of personal alignment) should be considered when making decisions that will impact our community. Good governance requires compromise, as no one entity or group will have all the answers. We must be flexible in our understanding and do so while prioritizing respect for those who offer differing opinions.

16. How can the city engage with Durham Public Schools and work toward implementing an “Aftercare for All” program that could benefit all DPS families?

The city can collaborate with Durham Public Schools to work towards implementing “Aftercare for All” by expanding the existing school-aged care program offered by Durham Parks and Recreation. Currently, the school-aged care program provides after-school care, as well as child care opportunities on teacher workdays, during spring and winter breaks, and throughout the summer. However, the program is limited to children aged five to twelve years old. This presents an opportunity to design a more comprehensive program that addresses the capacity shortfalls in the after-school care offerings provided by Durham Public Schools.

17. What steps would you take to create and improve ways for children to be able to walk or bike to schools?

The 2024 Connect Durham bond allocated \$10 million for sidewalk repairs and \$1.3 million for safer school zones and trail crossings. I would urge city management that, as these funds are put to use, there is a strong focus on repairing and creating sidewalks in close proximity to our K-12 educational institutions.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Please do not forget to provide us with your resume or biographical statement, as well as a high resolution headshot.