

2017 Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate's Full Name

Shelia Ann Huggins

Your current occupation

Attorney

Have you held an elected position before? If so, please describe.

No

Have you ever served on a public board or commission? If so, please state the name of the board and the dates that you served.

*North Carolina Central University School of Business Board of Visitors (current board member)
Alamance Community College Small Business Center Board of Advisors (current board member)*

Have you received endorsements from the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People, Friends of Durham, People's Alliance, or any other notable organization? If so, please indicate which ones.

Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People

1. What do you believe to be the most important job for a member of the City Council?

I believe the most important job for a member of the City Council is to listen to the people, by being respectful of their ideas and responsive to their needs.

2. Why have you decided to run for City Council in the City of Durham?

I've lived in the Triangle since 1985 and in Durham with my husband and daughter since 2001. I grew up in Greenville, North Carolina, long before East Carolina University was the third largest university in the UNC system and back when Greenville was truly a small, small town. Everyone was either a family member, close family friend, or a soon-to-be close family friend.

My parents were very active in the community. Consequently, I grew up registering people to vote before I was eligible to vote, attending precinct meetings at the American Legion building, and working at the polls on election day. My father served on the Parks and Recreation Commission, and my mother worked as a judge at our polling place. They worked hard to improve residents' lives and to make our neighborhoods better. A 1977 article in the Raleigh News and Observer's Carolina People section featured a story titled, Declining Neighborhood Fights for Survival with Group Action. In the article, my father and several residents in our neighborhood not only shared

their concerns about crime and housing, they also spoke about how they were working to make their neighborhood better. I wasn't yet ten years old.

My parents would go on to increase their level of involvement. My father eventually served on the Greenville City Council for several terms, and my mother is currently serving her second appointed term on the Pitt County Board of Commissioners. They have been active members of the NAACP, Democratic Party, and Eastern North Carolina Civic Group.

Running for office was never really on my to-do list. For a long time, I was content with giving back through my involvement with the Democratic Party, where I held a number of leadership positions including precinct chair, third vice-chair of the Wake County Democratic Party, secretary of the African-American Caucus of the N. C. Democratic Party, and state executive committee member. I currently serve as a member of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the DNC Small Business Caucus. I also served the residents of Durham as a City of Durham employee for almost nine years. That public service enabled me to help make Durham a great city, five days a week.

I am running because I believe that Durham is at a crossroads and that I am the best candidate to fill the Ward 3 seat. The decisions we make now will determine the trajectory of our city for years to come. Therefore, we need people on the City Council who are truly committed to all of Durham's residents, people who understand the challenges our City Council members will be tasked with resolving, and people who have experiences that they can draw upon to help us build the Durham of the future. There is too much at stake to vote simply based on endorsements, policy positions, and party affiliation. We must have people who are willing to listen to all voices, people who will challenge the traditional assumptions so frequently used during decision-making processes, and people who will have higher expectations of our community partners. This is the time for bold leadership and for open and honest conversations.

I bring a variety of experiences to the Ward 3 seat. During my nine-year tenure as a City of Durham employee I managed the budget process at the department level (for three divisions) and budgets at the division-level in two departments. I acted as project manager for the \$612,000 bond-funded construction project at Hayti Heritage Center, overseeing that budget and working closely with the center's executive director. I worked on a number of environmental matters including contaminated soil disposal during the construction of DPAC and well installation at the DAP. I drafted facility use agreements, managed employees and divisions, wrote agenda memos for City Council meetings, and managed the strategic planning process at the departmental level. I was the real estate manager/broker-in-charge for the City of Durham, overseeing a team of real estate brokers and managing the RFP process for the sale 102 Morris Street, which was redeveloped into a site with several businesses and a total tax value of over one million dollars. I currently practice law in downtown Durham, where I focus on business, contracts, arts, entertainment, and sports. I've worked with a number of Durham restaurants, artists, and small businesses, assisting them with leases, employment matters, and general contract issues. Prior to joining the City of Durham, I operated a real estate firm, and prior to law school, I worked as an environmental chemist advising businesses on hazardous waste management and waste minimization.

During my City of Durham employment, I was recognized as a Culture of Service Champion, received a S.T.A.R. award for teamwork, and completed the City's Management Academy. Having worked for the City of Durham, I understand the challenges that employees are sometimes faced with, such as limited financial resources and support, unrealistic deadlines and expectations, and stressful workloads. These challenges directly impact the level and quality of services that are provided to our residents. Consequently, I believe that I am the best candidate to help us address those challenges. That is why I am running.

3. Please define the constituency for a member of the City Council.

The constituency for a member of the City Council includes the city's residents, businesses, organizations, and institutions. In other words, the constituency is made up of those who are impacted by the decisions and actions/inactions that our City Council takes.

4. Please define the role you believe corporations and businesses should play within the City of Durham.

I believe that corporations and businesses should act as our partners in making Durham the best Durham that it can be for all of its residents. I think they should consider themselves to be leaders in our community and promote those policies that can assist our residents in obtaining better jobs and preparing for better job opportunities. I believe that they can be a vital source of information to Council members regarding the challenges that their employees are facing and that their businesses are facing in Durham, with the hope that we can all work together to address those challenges.

5. Do you support public-private partnerships through incentive opportunities for incubating and recruiting businesses? Please explain your answer.

I believe that the need for public-private partnerships through incentive opportunities for business recruitment is not as great as it was five years or so ago, and as recent as a few months ago, I was not a big supporter of incentives. But I think the question is more complicated than...do you support incentives or not. A scan of all business entities registered in Durham County through the department of the North Carolina Secretary of State lists over 2,000 business entities that have registered this year. Therefore, I don't necessarily believe that incentives are needed for general business incubation and recruitment. I do believe that we are not adequately supporting our smaller local businesses and that we are not adequately supporting our disadvantaged, minority, and under-represented businesses. Consequently, I would support creative opportunities that focuses on assisting these businesses and business communities.

6. In 2011, the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce led a sales tax referendum for multimodal transportation. Given recent updates, do you believe the transit plan still makes sense for Durham in 2017-2019? Also, do you believe this plan supports current and future growth patterns? Please explain your answers.

The referendum for multimodal transportation was in 2011. Since that time, Durham has grown and changed in a number of ways. We've added more bike lanes, changed some of our

transportation corridor patterns, and experienced increased interest from businesses wanting to locate in our city. I believe that the plan needs to be revisited, with an increased focus on hearing more from the members in our community.

7. Do you support tax or other fee increases to augment revenue growth? Do you feel the private sector should pay a greater cost burden? Please state why or why not.

I don't think anyone wants to pay any more in taxes than it takes for us to have a well-run city that provides the services needed for its community members. However, I believe that our budget needs to be directly tied to the services that are being provided and to the strategic plan that we have adopted. To the extent that we may sometimes need to increase taxes or fees to augment revenue growth, I would need to know more about that need before being able to state whether or not I would be supportive.

During my employment with the City of Durham, I managed budgets at the division level and the budget process at the departmental level. When our economy experienced the last severe economic downturn, I was able to put together a reduction budget without laying staff, although we did freeze vacant positions within my division. Consequently, I understand how to work under a forced efficiency model and would definitely want to be certain that we are adequately using our current funds efficiently and effectively before adding cost burdens to our community members. Regarding whether or not the private sector should have a larger cost burden, I believe that all businesses are unique and that therefore, the goal should be to make sure that all community members are paying their fair share. Of course, the dilemma is in determining what that fair share should be.

8. Please state the top three infrastructure challenges confronting the City of Durham. If elected, how do you plan to help resolve these challenges?

I believe that the top three infrastructure challenges confronting our city are 1) the maintenance, repair, and development of our transportation corridors, 2) the maintenance and repair needs of our city facilities, and 3) the combined challenges of focusing on meeting the infrastructure needs resulting from growth that is being experienced throughout our city with meeting the infrastructure needs in our communities of color as a result of disinvestment. The work that we do in these areas is limited by our budget, the number of employees working on these projects, and the time that it takes to carry out our plans to address these challenges. I believe that although the City's departments have prioritized the work that is being done in these areas, we need to continually evaluate how well we are performing and meeting these challenges. As a member of the City Council, I will work closely with the City Manager to confront these issues through our strategic planning process and through our budget.

9. What should the City's priorities be in working with other stakeholders to develop and preserve affordable housing?

I believe the City should work on the following:

- *Developing comprehensive affordable housing policies and practices for renters and homeowners;*

- *Working with our community partners to develop economic development strategies that consider and address the historic underutilization, underdevelopment, and marginalization of our communities of color and low income and low wealth neighborhoods;*
- *Working to redevelop community input processes that do not adequately result in representative participation in the development process from low income and low wealth residents and also persons of color.*
- *Finding creative ways to collaborate with developers to increase the affordable housing stock; and*
- *Partnering with our non-profit community organizations to increase the affordable housing stock.*

However, given that you can't purchase a home without a source of income I also believe that our City needs to focus on job creation, job training, and job stability, because our economy and labor force is also an important issue facing the City. We, therefore, need to be 1) supporting our community partners who provide mental and social health programs so that people are ready for job training programs, 2) supporting job training programs that are based on job market needs for the future, that provide more than a livable wage, and that provide an opportunity for our residents to develop a true career path, 3) supporting programs that increase the ability of our residents to start the businesses they want to start, and 4) pushing for our local employers to provide livable wages and opportunities for employees to unionize.

10. What additional business issue confronting the City of Durham in 2017-2019 do you believe to be the most important? Please explain your answer.

Poverty remains a challenge in many growing cities across the country, including Durham. Sources have estimated that between 55,000 to 75,000 residents in the City of Durham live below the poverty line. I believe that the first place to start tackling this issue is through targeted job creation and economic opportunities. We need to focus on decreasing living costs and increasing jobs by reducing public transportation fees for the unemployed and underemployed, pushing for living wages and pay equity commitments from businesses in our community, providing increased access to capital for new business owners through relationships with our community financing partners, partnering with community organizations that offer workshops for entrepreneurs, and working with our law enforcement community to end mass incarceration for low-level non-violent drug offenses that make it harder for our residents to obtain employment. I believe that the business community can lead the efforts in reducing poverty by helping us understand which job skills are needed now and which are anticipated to be needed in the future so that we can work with our community partners to make certain that they are training our residents for those jobs.

Signature:



Date: 10/23/2017