

2017 Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate's Full Name – *John Rooks, Jr.*

Your current occupation – *EDI Communications Engineer*

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. *Human Relations Commission – June 2017*

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. *People's Alliance and the communities I serve in Ward 2.*

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

It's apparent that most of the issues that come before the City Council deal with zoning. I would venture to say the most important job for the City Council is to listen to the community and represent them to the fullest.

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

I am running as a father and entrepreneur who is creating support systems in the community (ie; food drives, clothing drives and school resources). Over the last 14 years, I have worked with over 2000 families in an effort to create some form of stability in their household. I realized the issues are much larger than the resource needs. The issues of housing, economic and workforce development overshadowed the support systems my family and other community members had put in place. My experiences have shown me that there are voices that are not being heard. Everyone's voice is not being represented, or at the table, when the City Council is making decisions for the city as a whole. I am committed to serving in my community. I intend to be that voice and support those who have been overlooked or underrepresented.

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

The City Council constituency consists of all people who reside here.

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

Corporations and businesses know this is the place to be and we should continue to make them feel welcome. Understanding corporations and businesses play a crucial role in the success of our city, I would love to see them support some of the local businesses too. Durham has been named the sixth-best city to start a small business. I would like to see some leadership from the corporations and businesses take a strong stand and role in ensuring our city continues growth and success for the city as a whole.

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

Yes, based on observations of limited affordable housing availability, and the gross effects of gentrification, resources are not being adequately allocated for affordable housing. Public-private partnerships and cooperative arrangement are additional way to create incentives to encourage businesses to come to Durham and start using those incentives to also support areas around the city that have been overlooked.

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.

I support the Durham-Orange County transit plan as a future growth plan. However there are aspects of planning that need to address the immediate future as it pertains to Durham. As an immediate solution I have reservations as to the appropriate time. There are more impending issues that should be address for Durham's foreseeable future. There are federal obligations to fund various segments of local municipality, that I would not sacrifice for lightrail, if certain funding should be cut for housing, urban planning, transportation or infrastructure, the onus is on the City Council to review our current resources versus those expenditures and streamline, prioritize and effectively mitigate the burden of funding cuts or overruns.

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.

Generally, I would prefer not to increase property taxes. However, I reserve property taxes as the solution of last resort for supporting the basic public services of the city. I feel that user

fees can be regressive, and I would instead, favor small incremental adjustments to property taxes.

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 am not sure we can define just 3 top infrastructure challenges confronting the City when so many are vital. Water Quality, Trails, Greenways, Parks and Open Space are just to name some of the many. If I am pushed to mention my personal top three it would be the below.

Road maintenance – The city has increased its road maintenance budget to \$6 million this year. Using this money to address our local roads, potholes and manhole covers to ensure our commuters have a safe commute is essential.

Sidewalks – The city has to ensure our sidewalks are safe for pedestrians and most certainly our children who walk to school and our city parks. We should be using the full \$1.5 million of the city budget to complete this effort.

Water and sewer system – This infrastructure is essential to our lively hood. This along with other issues the city face will need to be a top priority. \$121.5 of the city budget is going to be used for this much needed effort.

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

Working in the community and sitting as commissioner on the Human Relations Commission has allowed me to see first-hand some of the issues and concerns some of our residents are facing. We have to be willing to work with all stakeholders to develop and preserve affordable housing. I would like to work with the Durham Housing Authority on policies that strengthen the program in a manner that empowers the residents. We should not shy away from other cities and states with proven models.

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. Jobs and Job training.

We can talk about affordable housing all day, but if a livable wage or job is not within a person's reach, it's all useless.

I would also like to see our city work more closely with our school systems to make sure we are providing kids with resources and supports that lead to skilled trades being offered to students in middle and high school. The reason why I state this as an important factor is because if you provide our youth with these skill sets they will more than likely be able to provide for their families.

Signature: John Rooks Jr. Date: October 25, 2017