

INDY Week candidate questionnaire

Name as it appears on the ballot: Jillian Johnson

Party affiliation, if any: Democrat, but race is nonpartisan

Campaign website: <http://www.durhamforall.com/>

Occupation & employer: Operations Director, Southern Vision Alliance

Years lived in Durham: 16

Please send a digital photo to jbillman@indyweek.com

1) Given the current direction of Durham city government, would you say things are generally on the right course? If not, what specific, major changes you will advocate if elected?

Durham is a city with amazing people, huge assets, and looming challenges. While there is a lot to celebrate in our city, I believe that there are important areas in need of attention to get Durham on the right course.

Though our city is growing and new development is coming to town, these changes are not benefiting all of our residents. At the same time that new restaurants, hotels, and condos are being built downtown, the surrounding neighborhoods are experiencing skyrocketing rents and home prices that have increased as much as 400% over the last 10 years. While new tech start-ups are rushing to our city, the unemployment rate for young people and people of color remains unacceptably high and 28% of our children live in poverty. Black and brown people are disproportionately targeted for traffic stops and searches by our police department, and many of our residents remain locked in our downtown jail simply because they are unable to pay bond. I believe that we are nearing a tipping point: will we develop as two separate and unequal Durhams, or will we come together and build a Durham for All?

My priorities as a member of City Council will be to put social and economic justice front and center. See below for additional proposals regarding affordable housing, police accountability, and racial and economic equity.

2) Please identify the three most pressing issues the city faces and how you will address them.

I believe the most important issues facing Durham are affordable housing, police accountability, and racial & economic justice.

I am deeply concerned about the rising cost of housing in the areas around downtown and increasingly all across Durham. The development in our downtown has been a benefit to many of us, but we must also address the needs of working people who have lived in central Durham for decades whose neighborhoods are

changing into places they can no longer afford to live and where they do not feel welcome.

I believe the city council should ensure that Durham maintains adequate stocks of affordable housing by:

- 1) Leveraging city resources to help nonprofit housing providers construct both for-sale and rental housing that is affordable for low-income people,
- 2) Committing city-owned land to the construction of affordable housing, especially near transit,
- 3) Demanding that housing developers who request city funding or significant zoning changes contribute to our affordable housing goals by providing affordable units as part of their developments and/or providing significant cash contributions to support affordable housing,
- 4) Providing safe and affordable alternative housing for every person living in public housing that is slated to be torn down,
- 5) Involving members of the communities most affected by these decisions and policies in every step of the process; and
- 6) Ensuring that issues of racial equity are addressed in any affordable housing plan.

I support the Durham CAN and Self-Help Credit Union proposal to build an affordable development on city-owned land adjacent to the bus station for households earning up to 60% of the area median income, or approximately \$40,000/year for a family of four.

I am also deeply troubled by recent traffic stop data that indicates that racial profiling continues to occur in the Durham Police Department. This is unacceptable and I believe that city council should continue efforts to monitor these statistics and demand action from the police department to reduce profiling and racially biased policing. I supported the adoption of the proposals of the Fostering Alternatives to Drug Enforcement (FADE) coalition, and would also support adopting their last remaining recommendation to make marijuana enforcement a lowest-level law enforcement priority. I also support the adoption of the Durham Community Safety Act proposed by Southerners on New Ground (SONG) as part of their Free From Fear campaign, which would ban any profiling on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, age, or gender identity.

Finally, I would like to see our city develop in ways that are more racially equitable and economically just. It is telling that as downtown is seeing such a huge boom, income inequality and child poverty rates have increased. Nearly 25% of Durham's census tracts are considered high-poverty. Unemployment rates for people of color

are higher and wages are lower. Crime rates in these areas are higher than in other parts of the city and economic and social opportunities are lacking. It is important to me that as we grow, we grow together as a city, and that development does not only benefit a privileged few, but rather uplifts our community as a whole.

3) What in your record as a public official or other experience demonstrates your ability to be effective as a member of Council? If you've identified specific issues above, what in your record has prepared you to be an effective advocate for them?

I have been working as a community organizer for 16 years and have extensive experience bringing people together and getting things done. For the last few years I have worked out of the Durham Solidarity Center and have been active in the Moral Monday movement, Occupy Durham, Black Lives Matter, and other political organizing. The Solidarity Center has supported many small community organizations with co-working space and resources. I also serve on the adult board of iNSIDE oUT, a youth-led organization for LGBTQ youth in the Triangle area.

My paid work for the last nine years has been as a nonprofit administrator. This work has given me experience doing everything from budgeting and bookkeeping to event planning and volunteer management to computer repair and website design. I have a wide variety of skills and excellent problem solving and critical thinking abilities.

I have worked on housing issues in Durham as an organizer with two campaigns. I was part of a campaign to reach out to residents at University Apartments when the building was sold and I collected the stories of residents who were being forced to leave the complex, many of whom had lived there for years. University Apartments reopened after renovations with 50% higher rents and marketing that appealed more to Duke University students. I also worked with residents at Lincoln Apartments when that complex was in danger of being closed.

I have worked on criminal justice issues as an organizer of a driver's license checkpoint watch program which operated in Durham, Orange, and Alamance counties. We trained community members to monitor police checkpoints for evidence of racially-biased traffic stops. I am currently working with a Black women's working group to plan events and actions highlighting the experience of black women in the criminal justice system.

4) Please give one specific example of something you think City Council has done wrong or that you would have rather done differently in the last year. Also, please tell us the single best thing the city's done during that span.

I believe it was a mistake for the city council to approve the sale of easements for the condominium development at 539 Foster St. The developer will not include any affordable units in this building, and the city has committed to ensure that at least 15% of housing within ½ mile of the proposed light rail transit stops is affordable. This was a missed opportunity to get some affordable units in the downtown area. If we are going to meet that goal, the city will have to push harder when developers seek easements or significant zoning changes in order to build, in addition to building affordable developments in cooperation with non-profit developers like Self-Help Credit Union.

The best thing I think the city has done in the last year is approve 4 of the 5 recommendations introduced by the FADE coalition. These recommendations were: 1) Mandate written consent forms for all vehicle consent searches, 2) implement a policy requiring mandatory periodic review of officer stop data, 3) reform and strengthen the Durham Civilian Police Review board, and 4) mandate that the department participate in formal racial equity training. I look forward to working to make sure these recommendations are fully implemented as a member of council and also working to implement the last remaining recommendation to make misdemeanor marijuana enforcement the department's lowest law enforcement priority.

5) How do you identify yourself to others in terms of your political philosophy? For example, do you tell people you're a conservative, a moderate, a progressive, a libertarian?

I identify as a progressive, and I believe in a progressive city that governs based on principles of racial, economic, and environmental justice, where we show the state and the country what's possible under truly progressive leadership. I believe in a thriving city that grows through inclusion, where everyone is involved in and benefits from the city's revitalization, and I believe in a courageous city that confronts disparity and demands equity, where poverty wages, skyrocketing rents, and racial profiling are unacceptable, and where race, class, immigration status, gender, and sexuality are not a basis for discrimination or exploitation.

6) The *INDY*'s mission is to help build a just community in the Triangle. If elected, how will your service in office help further that goal?

Economic and social justice is the lens through which I would evaluate all decisions that came before me on City Council. I have spent the last 16 years working in Durham on campaigns for living wages, racial equity, LGBTQ equality, fair housing, peace, and justice. I am deeply connected to the grassroots movements in our community.

If elected, I will put affordable housing, police accountability, and economic justice front and center as the greatest challenges facing our city right now. I will lead and participate in community engagement processes that elevate the voices and experiences of those most impacted by these challenges. I commit to listening, asking hard questions, prioritizing community accountability, and leveraging public resources to meet these challenges to the best of my ability.

Please address, in detail, the following major issues in Durham:

7) Do you believe that there is a disconnect between the citizens of Durham and the city's police force? If so, how would you go about remedying that disconnect? On a similar note, to what degree would you say you that Chief Jose Lopez has your full faith and confidence?

In any interaction between law enforcement and the public, there is inherently an imbalance of power. Law enforcement agents are authorized to carry deadly weapons and use force against civilians, and as such are wielding a powerful authority over us. I believe that any trust issues between residents and police result from this fundamental structural inequality. In addition, statistics show that black people, especially black men, are being stopped and searched in Durham at much higher rates than white people and that while consent searches have gone down since the department implemented a written consent policy, "probable cause" searches have gone up, indicating that officers are bypassing consent altogether and finding probable cause where perhaps none exists. These situations further exacerbate distrust.

I would address issues in the department by ensuring the full implementation of the five FADE recommendations that were introduced to the council last year, including the one that the council has not yet approved, making marijuana enforcement a lowest-level law enforcement priority. I would also adopt the Durham Community Safety Act, proposed by Southerners on New Ground (SONG) as part of their Free From Fear campaign, which would ban bias-based policing against African Americans, Latinos, immigrants, youth, and queer, trans, and gender non-conforming Durham residents. I also support strengthening the Civilian Police Review Board and giving them direct oversight powers over the police department.

I have come to believe that a change in the leadership of the Durham Police Department is needed. The police chief sets the tone and the culture for the department, and we need a person who is going to be serious about resolving the department's problems and being accountable to the community.

8) A report by the U.S. Department of Justice early this year concluded that black males between 15 and 34 in Durham are six times more likely to die from homicide than all other Durham residents. What steps should

local government and police take to address this problem? Does the city have its priorities in order when it comes to dealing with violent crime in low-income neighborhoods, at a time when there's so much focus on downtown development?

The violent crime that affects communities of color in Durham is truly devastating. I believe that more investment in community economic development in low-income areas of town is the primary way we will change these statistics. Good, safe jobs that pay living wages, educational and recreational programs for youth, and affordable housing and stable neighborhoods all create strong communities with low rates of crime. I also believe that mediation, nonviolent conflict resolution, and restorative justice are tools that can be used to build up the capacity of our communities to avoid creating the conditions that cause crime. I am hopeful that some of the tax revenues that city will receive from development downtown will be directed toward these critical priorities.

Though the city council has little power to address this issue, I would be remiss not to bring up the issues of guns, and how extremely dangerous our current state and national gun policies are. National action to reduce the number and availability of guns in this country is crucial for crime reduction efforts.

9) Do you think that support for saving the old Carpenter Chevrolet Building downtown justifies the anticipated \$80.9 million cost to renovate it for a new police headquarters? Do you see any alternatives that could have been explored? And do you think the city has enough substations where they're most needed?

The site purchased by the City for the new police HQ was not the best possible site, and was done in spite of substantial public feedback advising against it. Furthermore, given that the 12+ acre site of the former Hendrick's car dealership was purchased for \$5 million this year, it is very possible that the City overpaid for this 4.5 acre site at \$5.7 million. I wish there had been more scrutiny about the site and the purchase price, as well as a larger public conversation justifying the need for a new police building. There are a great many needs in the Durham community, and I believe that spending this amount of money to build a police station is something that deserves more public justification.

East Main Street is an important corridor that connects Northeast Central Durham to Downtown. Currently, the mega blocks of surface parking lots and public institutional uses create a problematic 'dead zone' of activity after 5 PM, which detracts from the safety, security, and potential revitalization of this area. The challenge is that the site and security concerns for the police HQ are in conflict with the desire for walkability, public amenities, and activating uses for the corridor. There are also historic preservation considerations for the Carpenter building, which currently houses El Centro.

Given the amount of money the Durham taxpayers are being asked to put into this project, I believe that preserving the Carpenter Building would best be done by a public-private partnership that would save us some much-needed dollars, such as in the plan proposed by Durham Area Designers. If security concerns for the police officers are determined to be a barrier to this plan or a similar plan, I would support re-opening the site selection process and choosing an alternative site where these issues would not be present. There are many potential uses for this plot of land that could meet the goals defined in our downtown master plan.

I believe that it would be appropriate to add police substations in communities where a majority of residents believe one is needed.

10) There's little doubt that Durham, as a whole, is prospering. But there's also little doubt that this prosperity is distributed unevenly. What should Council be doing to address inequality?

I believe it is critical for Durham City Council to address inequality through 1) continued and expanded public resources for a comprehensive affordable housing strategy, and 2) an economic development policy that prioritizes living wages, local hiring, and opportunities for job training and skill development that is attuned to the needs of the new economy.

11) In that vein, what more should the city be doing to address the need for affordable housing?

Durham City Council has made significant decisions over the past few years that acknowledge the critical need for affordable housing in Durham, including dedicating a 'penny' of every tax dollar for affordable housing and adopting a resolution for affordable housing goals within ½ mile of new proposed light rail stations. However, the need for a comprehensive affordable housing strategy, with broad public buy-in is sorely needed. The term "affordable housing" is a term that encompasses everything from ending homelessness, to public housing, to affordable rentals, to affordable home-ownership. All of these aspects of "affordable housing" are important and should factor into the City's future housing policy.

I am hopeful that the city's hiring of Enterprise Community Partners as a consultant to help us develop a comprehensive affordable housing strategy will have great results. I am committed to dedicating the public resources necessary to meet our strategic affordable housing goals for Durham residents.

12) As downtown grows, some degree of gentrification seems inevitable. What steps do you believe the city should be taking to revitalize neighborhoods without having them lose their character?

I believe the city should focus on implementing a comprehensive affordable housing policy and dedicate the requisite public resources needed to carry it out. The importance of publicly-owned land can not be overstated. City land must be dedicated to affordable housing in order to meet our goal of 15% affordable housing within ½ mile of light-rail transit stations. I believe this strategy should also include long-term affordability strategies such as that of the land trust model, where nonprofit ownership of the land guarantees affordability for much longer periods of time. We should also be investing public dollars to renovate existing affordable units in order to extend the period of affordability beyond what would be possible without public dollars.

In addition to providing more affordable units, the city should do whatever we can to make sure that people who currently live in affordable homes can stay. With tax revaluations upcoming, I think it is also important to consider the impact that rising home values due to gentrification will have on low-income homeowners and people living on fixed incomes. We need to do whatever possible to lessen the impact of this revaluation on these populations and help people stay in their homes. We should also put public dollars into renovation programs to help people with repairs that they might not be able to afford on their own.

13) What role should the city play in the development or redevelopment of commercial real estate? Do you believe the city should award incentives to private developers, and under what circumstances?

The City has used substantial public resources in the form of synthetic TIFs, building parking decks, street-scape improvements, and the tax abatement for historic landmark status to leverage public investment in downtown. Such projects as the American Tobacco campus redevelopment, West Village, and many others would not have happened without the assistance of the public sector.

We are undoubtedly in a new age. The word is out, Durham is a desirable place to live and work, and private developers from around the country are very interested in capitalizing on our success. I believe this warrants a new level of scrutiny about the use of public incentives. In the future, I believe we should be thinking more critically about the type of development we want, who it serves, and what litmus test we use to determine whether incentives are needed.

14) The Bull City Connector recently underwent route changes. Do you think the results are fair and efficient? If not, how could the

Connector's routes be changed to best serve the needs of residents most likely to use it?

I understand that the reason The Bull City Connector route changes were made was to improve efficiency and performance. However, it is the only fare-free bus in the public transit system, and it does not send a good message that it will now bypass the Durham Station Transportation Center -- the connection hub for many transit riders. As part of scaling transit ridership and creating additional efficiency, I am interested in the possibility of looking at other critical high use 'connector' routes in Durham and potentially making them reduced or fare-free.

15) Do you believe the downtown Loop is outdated? If so, what would you like to see done with it?

The downtown Loop was the product of misguided planning efforts that prized the automobile and devalued human-scale urbanism. The goal of the Loop was to get people into and out of downtown as fast as possible, and it succeeded.

However, over the past 20 years, our revitalized urban environment has brought jobs, amenities, and residential units back to the central city. At this point in our history, the Loop is a major impediment to connectivity between downtown and the surrounding urban neighborhoods, as well as the various nodes of activity within downtown.

Does the Loop need to be reconfigured? Yes. It will help with connectivity, walkability, safety, and economic development. The big question is: what will it cost? And how do we prioritize the reconfiguration of the Loop with the other competing community priorities we have in the City?

16) What are your initial thoughts on a proposed mixed-use development in North Durham, with a shopping center to be anchored by a Publix? Do you see, as some North Durham residents have expressed, opportunities to "fix" problems in the area of Guess and Latta roads with this development? (If so, what features would you like to see in the developer's plan?) Or are you more inclined to side with residents who believe that such a development would change the character of the neighborhood in undesirable ways?

The proposed mixed-use development in North Durham represents a common theme in Durham right now: how do we balance growth pressures with the desire of current residents to maintain their chosen lifestyle and environments? With this particular case, I would also add considerations about environmental impact, traffic, safety, and equity. I believe that it is important to get community input into this process, particularly from the communities that will be most directly impacted by

this development. Many residents have pointed out that there are a number of vacant/underutilized shopping centers within a short distance of the proposed rezoning site. It makes sense to redevelop these sites instead of clear-cutting a new site for development, so perhaps this would be an effective compromise.

17) If there are other issues you want to discuss, please do so here.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you!