



## Triangle Apartment Association 2019 Election Candidate Questionnaire

**Candidate Name:** Jillian Johnson  
**Office you are Seeking:** Durham City Council At-Large  
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### 1. Why are you running for office? What is your platform?

I'm running for office because I believe that Durham should be an inclusive city where everyone can thrive, regardless of their race or income. We have a lot of work to do to make that vision a reality, and we all need to do that work together. My platform focuses on the following five areas: democratic community engagement, inclusive economic development, housing access and affordability, community safety, and sustainability.

My full platform (joint with council members Javiera Caballero & Charlie Reece) can be accessed on my website in English at [jillianfordurham.com/platform](http://jillianfordurham.com/platform) and in Spanish at [jillianfordurham.com/plataforma](http://jillianfordurham.com/plataforma). Summaries of each platform point are below:

#### DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We believe in an inclusive and equitable government that trusts residents to be the experts on their own experiences. Social, economic and political elites have an outsized voice in our politics, resulting in inequitable outcomes. Robust community engagement creates space for communities to advocate for themselves and to ensure that government is responsive to their concerns. When all voices are heard, public policy benefits everyone.

#### INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

We believe in an economic prosperity that is broadly and equitably shared across our community. Historically, economic growth in Durham has not benefited everyone, resulting in widening economic inequality. Inclusive economic development seeks to lift up communities that have suffered from generations of disinvestment and racist public policy. A more just economy allows everyone to benefit from our city's growth.

#### HOUSING ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY

We believe that everyone deserves a safe, stable and affordable home. A rising tide of real estate speculation, gentrification and displacement is destroying Durham's unique character as a mixed income, multiracial and multicultural city. These disastrous trends are merely the modern manifestations of a history of discriminatory housing policy in this city. Public investment in the creation and preservation of affordable homes can mitigate the most destructive consequences we are experiencing in Durham. Together, we can build a Durham where anyone can afford to live regardless of race or income.

#### COMMUNITY SAFETY

We believe that everyone deserves to be safe and secure in our community. Despite recent progress here in Durham, far too many of our neighbors are still at risk of experiencing harm from community violence, racially disparate policing, and destructive federal immigration enforcement policies. To further reduce harm in our community, we must strengthen our work to address the root causes of violence while continuing to focus law enforcement resources on violent crime in our city. We envision a city where residents are able to live in neighborhoods free from the damaging impacts of violence in all its forms.

#### SUSTAINABILITY

We believe that everyone deserves to live in a healthy community. Durham faces many threats to our city's health and sustainability, including global climate change, inequitable access to outdoor spaces and green infrastructure, and

overwhelmingly car-centric development patterns. Aggressive investments in equitable green infrastructure (including protected bike lanes and greenways), public transportation, conservation, and renewable energy are no longer optional. With these investments, we can improve the health and well-being of our residents and contribute to the global effort to combat climate change.

## **2. What do you hope to accomplish during your time in office?**

I hope to advance the goals in my platform by implementing concrete policies to make Durham more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. Some of these policies include:

- Increase the availability of affordable housing by investing in a \$95M housing bond and providing resources to owners of affordable rental units in exchange for affordability commitments.
- Increase the availability of market-rate housing by removing regulatory barriers to denser housing in Durham's urban tier, while remaining sensitive to historic preservation and neighborhood livability concerns.
- Continue to implement biannual participatory budgeting cycles and biannual community conversations that focus on the needs of low-income people and people of color.
- Enhance our focus on racial equity by establishing a permanent race equity task force, implementing a citywide race equity tool, and implementing a language access plan for Spanish-speakers.
- Continue to partner with local nonprofits, educational institutions, other local governments, and local businesses to provide job training and opportunities to Durham residents, focusing on those who have the most difficulty accessing economic opportunity and our youth.
- Target city economic development incentives to support small local businesses, minority & women-owned businesses, worker-owned companies, and entrepreneurs who pay living wages and provide community benefits.
- Preserve affordable housing by supporting low-income homeowners to make needed repairs, increase city funding for tax relief programs, and provide support for non-profit housing organizations that serve our most vulnerable residents.
- Partner with Durham County to create a crisis first-responders program separate from the police department or Sheriff's office.
- Expand existing pre-arrest diversion program to include misdemeanor offenders regardless of age for nearly all first- and second-time offenders.
- Begin implementation of the City Council's recent resolution on global climate change by creating a fundable action plan for an equitable transition to carbon neutrality and 100% renewable energy in city operations by 2050.
- Create a "sustainability scorecard" within the city's capital budget process to identify projects that support Durham's renewable energy and carbon neutrality goals.

Other specific action items can be found online on my website at [jillianfordurham.com/platform](http://jillianfordurham.com/platform).

## **3. What particular skill or area of expertise do you have that would benefit the office you wish to seek?**

I have nearly 4 years of experience on council, which has given me the skills to navigate the city's administration, and 20 years of experience as a community activist, which has allowed me to develop strong relationships with leaders throughout the Durham community. I strive to make all my decisions based on the best available evidence, rather than political considerations or anecdotes. I spend a lot of time reading policy and learning from elected officials in other cities, and am committed to bringing new ideas and best practices to Durham.

## **4. What do you consider to be the most significant issue your community will face this upcoming year?**

Our biggest issue is a lack of access to affordable housing, especially for people at the lowest income levels. A lack of stable housing has an incredible number of residual consequences: for example, lower school performance in children, transportation challenges, issues getting and keeping a stable job, mental health challenges, etc. As Durham continues

to grow rapidly, and higher-income people relocate to Durham from areas with higher costs of living, we will continue to see a shortage of affordable housing. Passing the housing bond referendum this fall will set us up to take bold action and have a significant impact on this problem by providing new affordable housing and opportunities to stabilize existing affordable housing.

**5. What is your overall impression of the apartment industry?**

The apartment industry is an active and growing industry in the Triangle, and apartment communities help provide dense, transit-supportive, affordable housing options in the region. Apartment housing will play a larger role in our city as we continue to grow and develop, as we look for ways to house more residents in more sustainable and affordable ways.

**6. The high-density housing provided by the apartment industry affords communities with several significant advantages. These advantages include reduced sprawl, reduced infrastructure requirements and higher tax revenue per acre, among others. In light of these benefits, what are your views on density as the Triangle continues to grow?**

I believe the Triangle needs to greatly increase housing density in our urban areas in order to meet the increasing demands for housing in our area and minimize the environmental impacts of growth. I support removing regulatory barriers to higher-density housing while preserving neighborhood livability and encouraging high-quality housing.

**7. Apartment living is a logical choice in any economic climate; studies show even more cost-effective when there is an adequate public transit system. What are your views on public transit in the Triangle region?**

I believe that the Triangle must implement a comprehensive public transit strategy as soon as possible in order to provide a sustainable transportation option to our growing population. In Durham, with the demise of light rail, we are actively working on plans to increase the capacity and routes of our bus system and implement bus rapid transit. I support increased public investment in transit and policies to disincentivize the use of cars.

**8. What policies would you propose or support to make housing affordable to both owners and renters?**

I support public investment in affordable housing, including but not limited to: direct city subsidy of affordable housing projects, city support for projects applying for state affordable housing tax credits, city funding of nonprofit housing agencies that are reaching our hardest to serve residents, partnership with the county to provide eviction diversion and homeless diversion services, the establishment of an affordable housing loan fund, and providing city funds for repairs and tax abatement for low-income residents.

**9. What groups do you feel will be supportive of your campaign? Have you received any endorsements?**

I believe my campaign will be supported by progressive organizations that want to see Durham grow by inclusion and provide opportunity for all of our diverse communities. I have received the endorsement of the LGBTQ Victory Fund, Mayor Steve Schewel, and Council Members Javiera Caballero & Charlie Reece. In 2015 I was endorsed by the Durham People's Alliance, the Independent Weekly, Equality NC, and the NC AFL-CIO. I will be applying again for those endorsements, as well as other local endorsements.

**10. Why should TAA endorse your candidacy?**

I believe that my political experience, my platform, and my deep commitment to policy that works for our most marginalized residents make me a strong candidate to lead Durham in this time of rapid growth and development. I care about public transit and walkability of neighborhoods, appreciate the positive impact of urban housing density, and am interested in finding ways to keep existing rental units affordable. Achieving these policy goals will require working with owners as well as renters to advance a vision that benefits the community as a whole.

Thank you for allowing our members the opportunity to get to know you better!



**Please return completed questionnaire to Dustin Engelken, Director of Government Affairs at Triangle Apartment Association: [dengelken@triangleaptassn.org](mailto:dengelken@triangleaptassn.org) or fax to 919.782.1169.**