

Triangle Labor Council Questionnaire for Mayoral and City Council Candidates

1. What do you believe are the most important issues facing your city in the coming years?

I believe the most important issue facing Durham today is access to affordable housing. As Durham has grown and developed, especially in the downtown core, we've also seen a huge increase in rents and home prices in downtown neighborhoods. These changes have resulted in low-income people and people of color being displaced from these areas. Part of the housing crisis is of course the problem of low wages. The city is tackling this issue in several ways. As one of the largest employers in the county, the City of Durham has both a responsibility and an opportunity to provide good jobs for Durham residents and set a standard as a model employer. As a council member, I have consistently lobbied for higher wages and better benefits for city workers. We raised the wages of all full-time workers to at least \$15/hr last year, and all part-time workers will also be raised to our current living wage standard later this year. At my request, city staff are investigating ways to raise the wages of workers at city-owned facilities with contracted management, such as the DPAC, Carolina Theater, and Bulls Stadium. The city has created a transitional jobs program for people returning home from jail or prison which allows people to work for the city, receiving valuable training and work experience and making at least our living wage. When the city provides jobs creation incentives, employers are required to provide at least the city's living wage of \$15.46/hr, plus health insurance benefits. We should also require these standards when granting economic development incentives by using an equitable development scorecard and community benefits agreement.

Finally, we also need to focus on sustainability. As we know, we have just over a decade to avert disastrous impacts from climate change. Focusing on sustainable transportation infrastructure for biking and walking is more important now than ever. The city is continuing to invest additional funds each year into sidewalks, planting more street trees, developing nicer open spaces, and starting to build protected bike lanes. We also need more busses and to develop the planned regional rail line to Raleigh to help alleviate traffic congestion in the I-40 corridor.

2. What is your view of the role unions and union members play in the city?

I am a strong supporter of unions and have been involved with the labor movement since I was a teenager. Unions are responsible for all of the labor laws and protections that we have today, and I've been a proud union member in the past and worked as a union organizer. Though NC is not a high union density state, we're lucky to have UE-150 representing city workers and a number of other strong unions representing service workers, teachers, graduate students, bus drivers, domestic workers, and others in the city. I'm looking forward to working with unions, union members, and workers organizations more closely now that the city has a Worker's Rights Commission.

3. The right of workers to join unions and collectively bargain with their employers is a cornerstone of American democracy. Under the Constitution, both public and private sector workers have the right to join a union. Private sector workers across the country are also guaranteed the right to collectively bargain under federal labor law. The majority of states recognize collective bargaining rights for some, if not all, of their public employees. It is well-recognized that public sector collective bargaining promotes labor peace, facilitates effective and efficient provision of public services, and combats workplace discrimination.

Despite this widespread consensus, North Carolina remains as one of only three states with a blanket prohibition on public sector collective bargaining. This outlier status has gained negative attention both at home and abroad. In 2007, the International Labor Organization of the United Nations called for promotion “of the establishment of a collective bargaining framework in the public sector in North Carolina.”

A simple repeal of the ban on collective bargaining would be a modest step, bringing North Carolina in line with the rest of the country. Repealing the ban would not require that governmental entities collectively bargain with unions, but would give them the option to bargain should they wish to do so. Also, repealing the ban would not affect the existing prohibition on public employee strikes.

Do you support the right of public employees to engage in collective bargaining?

Yes, I fully support the right of public employees to collectively bargain. Collective bargaining improves the lives of workers and should be encouraged and respected.

If so, would you publicly support of public sector collective bargaining by, for example, writing a letter to local legislators?

Yes. Last year I introduced a resolution supporting the right of public employees to collectively bargain, which passed unanimously. I also included a repeal of the ban on collective bargaining in our city’s legislative agenda and attended a press conference with Durham’s NCGA Rep. Zack Hawkins to support repeal of the ban.

4. Public employees’ right to join together in a union is rooted in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. When employees join labor unions, they use their collective voice to make positive changes at work. Union dues are an important investment in the strength of labor unions. Dues are used to support the work the union does protecting the rights of employees. Accordingly, many union members ask their employers to automatically deduct dues from their paychecks and send them directly to their unions. This practice is used widely in the private sector as it is convenient for all parties involved and allows unions to receive regular payment so that it can effectively carry out its duties. Unfortunately, some public employers and policymakers do not want employees to have the freedom to deduct dues from their paychecks. Given that employers often deduct contributions for United Way and other

programs, there is simply no explanation for such opposition other than to undermine union members and their unions.

Do you support dues check-off (payroll deductions) for public employees who join unions?

Yes, I believe that union members should have access to payroll deduction. The efforts to prevent union members from paying dues through payroll deductions are a transparent attempt to weaken unions by starving them of resources.

5. The National Labor Relations Act protects the right of most private sector employees to unionize without facing retaliation from their employers. Such protection, for both private sector and public sector employees, is essential to employee choice, given the inherent power imbalance between employees and employers. Without protection from retaliation, employees face intimidation, threats, and potential job loss for trying to form a union or merely talking about working conditions or exploring the possibility of unionization.

Do you believe that all workers should be free to choose a union or association of their choice without fear of retribution?

Yes, I believe that workers should be able to freely organize without fear and without anti-union attacks from their employers. Employers should maintain neutrality and allow workers to freely choose whether or not to be represented by a labor union.

6. Many North Carolina residents – including employees providing essential public services – do not earn enough to make ends meet. Women and people of color are disproportionately affected by poverty as they earn even less than their white male counterparts. No employee working full-time should be unable to feed his or her family or live below the poverty line. A growing number of cities and states have recognized the dire need for increasing the minimum wage to keep up with the cost of living. Studies have shown that raising the minimum wage benefits local economies, lowers unemployment, and stimulates job creation because employees are able to spend their wages and boost local businesses, which in turn create more jobs. Although local governments in North Carolina are currently prohibited from enacting higher minimum wages, even for their own contractors, they can determine the wages of their own employees.

Do you support the concept of a “living wage” of at least \$15 an hour for city workers and those workers employed by companies with city contracts?

Yes, I support living wages for city workers and am proud that the City of Durham currently pays all full-time employees a living wage of at least \$15.46/hr. We will also be bringing part-time workers

up to that standard this year. Unfortunately, state law preempts municipalities from requiring city contractors to pay living wages.

If yes, would you be willing to test the limits of efforts by the state legislature to preempt such action at the local level?

Yes, I am very interested in challenging this state law. I am currently involved in a conversation with Fight for \$15, the AFL-CIO, and others about how we might mount a legal challenge, ideally with several cities signing on. Unfortunately there's a constitutional provision in NC that might preempt municipal action on wages even without HB142 and other laws prohibiting us from regulating employment conditions. I look forward to continuing this conversation and hearing back from legal researchers about what challenges we might be able to successfully mount.

7. Our state has prided itself historically on attempting to attract business on the basis of low wages. Our state has much more to offer and our workers deserve much better. Our state's workers deserve to earn enough to support their families, enjoy their lives, and help boost their local economies. Spending our citizens' tax money to entice companies that will not pay decent wages is counterproductive on all counts.

Do you support tying tax incentives offered to companies relocating to your county to a requirement that those companies pay a living wage with benefits and adhere to job safety standards?

Yes, I believe that Durham should only provide jobs and economic development incentives to companies who agree to meet high standards for public benefits. These companies should commit to paying living wages, providing fair benefits, hiring locally, hiring justice-involved residents, etc. Durham is in the process of implementing a scorecard process for incentive proposals that will allow us to more objectively score and compare proposals with regard to public benefits.

8. Given the growth of the city, how would you improve public transportation and access to affordable housing?

In the four years that I've been serving on City Council, we have more than doubled our annual investment in affordable housing through our dedicated housing fund. I also enthusiastically support the \$95M affordable housing bond that will be on the ballot this fall, and if re-elected, I will ensure that this funding is used to its best and highest impact to increase the amount of affordable housing in our community. Because our affordable housing crisis is in tandem with a shortage in housing overall, I also support efforts to increase housing density in the urban tier, while still preserving quality of life in urban tier neighborhoods. These efforts include allowing duplexes, ADU's and smaller homes on smaller lots through implementation of the "Expanding Housing Choices" initiative and developing a new comprehensive plan.

I support expanding transit service throughout the city, particularly in low-income communities where residents are less likely to own their own cars. We need more frequent busses, more routes, and more bus shelters to encourage ridership. We should pay particular attention to transit services in areas like South Durham, which are growing very quickly but have a largely suburban development pattern. These development patterns are less friendly to transit, so we'll have to be more creative to make sure to provide access. In less dense areas like North Durham, we should provide more access to on-demand services so that everyone has access to transit, even where it doesn't make sense to provide a whole bus route. I support recent efforts to provide free youth go-passes to students under 18 and to fund any budget shortfalls with tax revenue so that fares can stay at \$1.

9. If you have the opportunity to name or recommend an individual to a board or commission, would you consider naming a labor union member?

Yes, I am always excited for the opportunity to appoint union members to leadership roles in the city. I was happy to have the opportunity to vote for several union members to join the city's new Worker's Rights Commission earlier this year.

10. Briefly describe your strategy to win, including campaign structure, fundraising and communications.

I am running under a shared platform and joint field strategy with two other incumbent council members, Javiera Caballero & Charlie Reece. Our shared platform is very comprehensive and includes a number of bold progressive policy proposals that we're excited to implement over the next four years. We share a campaign manager, and I also have a campaign coordinator and a treasurer. We plan to canvass for at least 8 weekends in September and October. I've raised about 60% of my budget and continue to focus on fundraising. I am using my personal Twitter account for campaign-related updates and I have about 3,500 followers. I have a campaign Facebook page with about 700 likes and an email list of about 1,000. I send regular emails and post regularly to social media. I will be seeking endorsements from local, statewide, and national organizations.

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