



2021 Alexandria City Council Candidate Survey

The following questions are derived from the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce's 2021 Legislative Agenda. Through the Legislative Agenda, the Chamber has identified its priority action items for the next year and beyond.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. We encourage you to review the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce's 2021 Legislative Agenda as you prepare your answers.

Your answers will be made available to the Alexandria business community and other interested parties in whole and without edits. Please return the completed survey to Maria Ciarrocchi, mciarrocchi@thechamberalx.com by April 30, 2021.

We appreciate your cooperation.

1. INTRODUCTION - Please introduce yourself and describe why you are seeking a seat on the Alexandria City Council. For this question you are welcome to submit a brief video.

<https://youtu.be/bT3kBv578eM>

2. COVID-19 RECOVERY – Please share your thoughts on what economic recovery looks like for the City, particularly its businesses.

Our businesses are vital to our City's success. Unfortunately, many are struggling in the wake of COVID-19, whose affects will be felt for many years to come. These hardships are particularly felt by women-owned and people of color owned businesses.

As we look to rebound our local economy from the effects of COVID-19, we shouldn't just be looking to recover the economy we had before the pandemic, **we should be looking to transform it.** The pandemic exposed the weaknesses in our economy but has also forced us to think innovatively. Let's seize this moment to build a more resilient and inclusive economy that is better insulated against future economic disruptions.

All recovery planning and investments need to be done with an intentional focus on equity and created in partnership with a diverse (e.g., racially/ethnically, geographically, size, etc.) array of business leaders. This type of recovery will require:

- Cultivating partnerships with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), community banks, credit unions and other organizations with experience serving minority-owned businesses
- Creating grant programs specifically targeted to women and minority-owned businesses to support planning, opening, or preservation/recovery planning
- Continuing to provide tax relief/payment plan options and rent relief to business owners unable to make payments due to the pandemic
- Extending creative and flexible zoning changes that allow businesses to adapt and we continue to navigate the pandemic and ensure these options are communicated to all businesses
- Reimagining office space left vacant by the pandemic, including potentially establishing business incubators
- Supporting businesses in expanding broadband access and shifting to digital operations/experiences
- Expand opportunities for participation and co-decision making by individual residents and Civic Associations, including virtual engagements, methods that bring meetings to neighborhoods and to the people, open mic nights, interactive maps, and feedback loops so that allow community members to see how their feedback is incorporated
- Expanding investments in the protection, preservation, and production of affordable housing
- Increasing childcare seats and options, as well as before school and afterschool programs, to support workforce participation

We also need to understand that not every business will recover or transform equally, and some may never recover at all. Our service, hospitality, and tourism sectors may never be the same again. As part of the recovery, Council must also be laser focused on supporting workforce development programs for those looking to reskill, promoting technical and professional apprenticeship programs, and to makers spaces such as The Garden to provide platforms for new companies to get off the ground.

3. COVID-19 CHANGES – The City has relaxed a fair number of regulations to allow for businesses to operate under COVID-19 protocol. Which of these loosened restrictions would you like to see in perpetuity? Are there any you would like to roll back?

- 1.) Outdoor Dining: One of the most noticeable changes to our service and hospitality sectors has been the expansion of outdoor dining spaces. The pedestrian mall with outdoor seating in the 100 Block of King Street and outdoor café seating areas along other City streets has helped to create new experiences and build public confidence in returning to restaurants. I have heard positive feedback from our business owners and residents. We should take steps to codify the flexibility that allowed for this expansion and explore where this model might make sense in other areas so that our businesses have the certainty they need to make additional investments in making these options even better for local residents and visitors.
- 2.) Alcoholic Beverage Laws: The ability to sell certain alcoholic beverages “to-go” has helped to sustain our food service sector over the past year. We shouldn’t waste the lessons we have learned over this period, but rather build on them to work with State

officials to codify these policies permanently.

- 3.) Virtual Meetings: To expand opportunities for community engagement, the City should continue offering virtual meeting options as another way to collect community ideas, concerns, and experiences in city decision-making processes. As a Council Member, I would work with the City Manager and staff, including the City's Race and Social Equity Officer, to develop community engagement plans to ensure that our methods of engagement are timely, accessible, and inclusive and that we have metrics to hold ourselves accountable. Having multiple ways to engage residents is beneficial for all -- people working multiple jobs, persons with disabilities, and business owners who cannot afford to take valuable time away from their business.
- 4.) Repealing the Dillon Rule: Each of the issues raised above could be significantly mitigated if we were to repeal the Dillon Rule. By empowering local government to act locally to implement local solutions, and only deferring to State intervention when absolutely necessary we would be in a much better position to serve our community.
- 5.) Equity & Inclusion - There is a broader conversation about equity in relation to COVID-19 as well as racial justice in response to recent events throughout the country. Alexandria demonstrated a commitment to advancing equity in its work with the addition of the Race and Social Equity Officer. As an elected leader, working in concert with the Race and Social Equity Officer, what ideas do you have to help Alexandria, particularly the business community, work towards being more inclusive.

Investing in women owned, minority, and underrepresented businesses, expanding workforce development programs for under-represented groups throughout the city, and increasing civic engagement not only makes good business sense but is also essential for becoming a more equitable city. Such actions help to promote economic growth through increased job creation and to build a pipeline of talent from diverse backgrounds. I am committed to working with the City's Race and Social Equity Officer, in addition to all entities that support our business community (e.g. the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, the Small Business Development Center, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, Visit Alexandria, etc.) to:

- Increase access to capital for women owned, minority, and underrepresented businesses and entrepreneurs
- Ensure local grant programs have set asides/ targeted assistance for women-owned businesses, people of color owned businesses, and businesses located in low-income communities
- Partner with the development community to leverage Community Development Block Grant Dollars, New Markets Tax Credits, and Historic Preservation Tax Incentives to build or rehabilitate physical locations including office space or retail locations
- Explore feasibility of a "Startup in Residence" program in city government for women owned, minority, and underrepresented entrepreneurs
- Partner with Alexandria Public Schools and the Alexandria Chamber to support training in basic professional skills development for elementary and secondary students
- Expand workforce development programs in sectors such as trades and technology in traditionally underserved communities throughout the city
- Improve connectivity and transit options to employment centers

- Identify and implement best practices from other cities on meaningful and authentic engagement practices and techniques to enable better partnerships with community-based organizations, business groups, businesses and individuals to create a more comprehensive and diverse voice of the stakeholder in decision-making processes
- Engage community partners to help with more robust and intentional outreach
- Develop metrics so that we can set targets and hold ourselves accountable for creating a more inclusive business community

5. CITY ISSUES – What do you feel are the three (3) most pressing issues facing the City of Alexandria today?

- 1.) Creating a More Equitable Community: Equity is not about connecting everyone to the same thing; it's about ensuring that people have the resources, opportunities, training and working conditions they need to be successful. We need to eliminate inequities in our community, especially for children in our minority communities. ZIP Code should not be a predator of health outcomes, climate impacts and child success.
- 2.) Expanding Affordable Housing Options: Housing is the foundation of a vibrant community. One in five Alexandria households earning up to \$75,000 per year currently spend 30% or more of their income on housing. We need a new conversation and new action on housing, including aggressively pursuing public-private housing partnerships, planning for climate change and environmental impact, and re-envisioning the use of public land to create more opportunities for affordable housing. If we fail to act now, we will lose the diversity of people and small businesses that make our community great.
- 3.) Closing the Achievement Gap: Although COVID-19 didn't create the achievement gap, it has significantly exacerbated it. Our investments in our young people has to begin with our youngest learners, ages 0-3, and is essential to our economic recovery. As a City, we need to find ways to increase the number of childcare slots for children 0-3 so that all our children have access to safe, high-quality, affordable options.

6. STATE AND REGIONAL ISSUES – What do you feel are the most pressing state and regional issues effecting Alexandria?

- 1.) Local Taxing Authority: Our region is the economic heartbeat of the Commonwealth, as well at the Mid-Atlantic region. I recognize that we have a role to play in supporting

our neighbors across the state, but it's also important that we erase the perception that Northern Virginia does not experience poverty or other related challenges. If Richmond were to expand our local taxing authority, or agree to return a higher percentage of our local taxes to the communities that paid them we could have an immediate impact on some of our most persistent challenges.

- 2.) **Unfunded State Mandates:** While I celebrate many of the achievements of our General Assembly over the past two years, which has made historic progress on a number of significant issues, oftentimes the solutions coming from Richmond only address part of the problem. An example of this is the local match to the recent 5% pay increase for Virginia teachers. Our teachers are one of our most important assets, and deserve a raise. However, the local match required to unlock state funding to support the increases was so imbalanced that it was out of reach for many jurisdictions, especially those with higher baseline standards not recognized by the State. We need to ensure that when we take steps to support good government that those investments are not just symbolic, but are actually realized.