



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.

My name is Kevin Harris, I'm a Minister, community organizer, small business owner, husband of 17 years, and a father of four girls who attend ACPS schools, and I'm running for City Council to create a more equitable Alexandria.

I've considered Alexandria home since attending John Adams Elementary while living in Southern Towers on the West End. I believe that Alexandria is a wonderful place to live, but we still have an equity issue that lingers in the shadows that needs to be addressed if we are to continue to shine as a city.

As a Minister I know individuals who work in the city but can't afford to live here. As a community organizer, I know communities whose voices are underrepresented. As an entrepreneur, I know small business owners who aren't extended the same courtesy as larger companies. And as a father, I've witnessed the educational gap that exists for girls and students of color.

For years, I have fought on the ground to empower these groups and communities that have been systematically marginalized. Now I'm running for City Council to continue my fight to ensure that equity is no longer a buzz-word in Alexandria, but a reality, because I know that Alexandria is stronger for everyone when all voices are considered and the marginalized have a seat at the table.

2. COVID-19 RECOVERY – Please share your thoughts on what economic recovery

looks like for the City, particularly its businesses.

COVID-19 has significantly damaged our business community, particularly those in the service and food industries. I believe that to take the necessary steps for recovery, the City needs to work with our local businesses to ease that burden.

We also need to ensure that the recovery is equitable across the board. I've spoken with over two dozen black owned businesses, and none received recovery funds. Our city cannot afford to have a recovery where only some businesses recover.

I also believe that many industries will need to adjust to a "post-covid" reality. Though I do not believe we will be as highly impacted as other markets, the DC commercial real estate market is not fully immune to a possible downturn in commercial real estate if more people begin permanently working from home. Working with those companies in advance of that economic downturn is key.

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?

I would like to keep many of the outdoor seating options available at our restaurants. I believe it adds a broad sense of vibrancy to our city.

However, I would like to take a deeper look at some of our changed parking restrictions in response to the added outdoor seating, to see how the removal of parking spaces has impacted other businesses.

4. 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?

I've met with over two dozen black owned businesses in the city, and these conversations have had a common thread -None received COVID-19 relief funds dedicated to help businesses survive the horrific impact the pandemic has had on our local small businesses, and none belong to any of Alexandria's existing Business Associations.

To make Alexandria more inclusive, we need to ensure that our organizations represent the entire community. That's why I've launched both a black-owned businesses roundtable and a Minority Owned Businesses Association, ensuring that our communities have a seat at the table when decisions are made.

We also need to ensure that our boards and commissions represent our entire community. For the last few years, I've worked to diversify some of our boards, getting low-income

African-Americans on the Economic Opportunity Board, Juvenile Justice Board, and other boards throughout the city.

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

1- Equity - Ensuring all voices are heard. Throughout my time as an organizer, I've seen how Alexandria operates. Working class communities and communities of color are not a part of the discussion, leaving the most impacted people without a seat at the table. This leads to Council making decisions on what is best for the few people in contact with them, not on what is best for the marginalized of our city.

2- Equity Initiatives- We are launching multiple initiatives centered around equity.

For example, only 9 of our 250 union firefighters live in the city of Alexandria due to a lack of affordable housing. This causes high turnover, and is bluntly just wrong. I'm proposing that we not only grant city workers the right to collectively bargain, but that we create a stipend for first responders to offset our ridiculous housing costs.

I would also like to lower the number of students we have living in poverty. 61% of Alexandria City Public School students are on free or reduced lunch. I will launch a "Whole School, Whole Child, Whole Family" initiative where we would train the parents of these students, and then use that labor force for our school infrastructure projects.

3- Affordable Housing - Alexandria has lost 90% of our affordable housing stock since the year 2000. To ensure more people are not displaced, the City needs to be bold in our new developments, prioritizing density while simultaneously pushing for more units at lower AMI levels.

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

1- **Ensuring WMATA is fully funded** - The DC Metro is the heartbeat to our economy, with hundreds of thousands of workers using it daily. COVID-19 has completely decimated the Metro operating budget. We need to ensure Metro is fully funded and operational to ensure our economic well-being. Metro also takes funds from VA, DC, MD as well as the local municipalities where it operates, so it needs to be a collective effort.

2 - **Affordable Housing** - The entire DMV region needs to increase our housing supply significantly to accommodate the growing need for housing.

3- **Ensuring we have an educated workforce that represents the entire community** - We

collectively need to ensure that our workforce is educated in the proper fields and trades to ensure our region continues to thrive. This means getting more people trained in trades like HVAC and plumbing, as well as ensuring more constituents are trained how to code.

We also need to ensure that all members of our community have access to the modern economy. Providing funding for programs for students of color to focus on STEM or trades is essential to making our region more equitable.