

Chamber of Commerce
Due April 30, 2021

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.
 - a. As a fourth generation Alexandrian, father, and small business owner, I've been a fierce fighter for an inclusive and more just Alexandria – for all Alexandrians. Growing up in the North Old Town and Quaker Hill public housing communities, I developed a passion for serving those that are underrepresented and underserved – many of them Black and Brown. Even before I entered elected office, I worked as a local community activist and President of the Alexandria Branch of the NAACP, where I was an advocate for affordable housing and public safety.
 - b. As a member of Council, I've been especially focused on securing more affordable housing for our residents and workers, expanding access to Pre-K for our children, working to make much needed investments in our economy and infrastructure, and I will remain a strong advocate for the underserved. The issues that we face in Alexandria are indeed challenging and no doubt further complicated by an ongoing global pandemic; but there is still more work to chart out our post pandemic economic recovery. With my vision and experience, I want us to build on the work we've done to prepare all of us for the challenges and unique opportunities ahead.
2. COVID-19 RECOVERY – Please share your thoughts on what economic recovery looks like for the City, particularly its businesses.
 - a. When it comes to schools, and I'm sure many parents will be happy to hear this, is re-opening our schools. I know that this last year has been incredibly challenging for both our kids and their parents. In March, I facilitated a virtual session with parents discussing this very issue and sought input on how we can reopen safely. I will be working with ACPS to ensure we open schools safely and in accordance with CDC guidance.
 - b. The helping businesses recover from the pandemic is going to take real leadership. As a small business owner, I know first-hand how this pandemic has ravaged this community. That's why one of my top priorities will be to help our businesses bounce back and create the environment for them to compete both online and with regional competitors. To get us all back on track, I will convene an Alexandria Small Business Recovery Task Force to frame the policy changes and initiatives that will aid in the recovery of Alexandria's business community and shape Alexandria into a strong regional economic

community. Also, working through AEDP, we will continue to highlight financial opportunities for businesses, so that our business community can take advantage of any assistance available.

- c. I want to also Launch an initiative to provide free PPE to Alexandria's small businesses, so businesses can take this out of their expenses. In that same vain, I plan to work with local financial institutions to understand the nature of their relationship with our small business communities (i.e. grants, loans) and what more can be done to expand access to capital for small businesses.
- d. I also want to leverage the marketing work of Visit Alexandria to get more consumers into Alexandria, learning about our local businesses and spending money with them.

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?

- a. I think we must follow the science and guidance from the CDC and our local health department officials. That said, I am very proud of how the city has moved to be flexible with business policy changes, and I want to keep them all, particularly policies around curbside pickup and delivery. I also want to expand the opportunity for outdoor dining by looking at where parklets can add those opportunities . I am a small business owner as well and completely understand the impact that this pandemic has had on the business community. I am sensitive to that and will continue to monitor updated guidance and recommendations that ensure safety for our business community and customers. And of course, we need to keep the pedestrian plaza at the bottom of King Street, and see where else we can have them!

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?

- a. As a fourth generation Alexandrian, father, and small business owner, I've been a fierce fighter for an inclusive and more just Alexandria – for all Alexandrians.
- b. Growing up in the North Old Town and Quaker Hill public housing communities, I developed a passion for serving those that are underrepresented and underserved – many of them Black and Brown. Even before I entered elected office, I worked as a local community activist and President of the Alexandria Branch of the NAACP, where I was an advocate for affordable housing and public safety.

- c. **I have a record on this.** In 2016, I was proud to lead the charge with other members of Council to issue a statement on inclusiveness, but we know there is much more work to be done. Earlier this year, we adopted a resolution to acknowledge racial inequity in our past and in the present.
 - 1. As a part of the resolution, we advanced “ALL Alexandria” which is our commitment to pursue equitable outcomes for everyone in the community.
 - 2. As a part of that, we hired a Race and Social Equity Officer (Jacqueline Tucker) to be focused just on this. She organized public engagement sessions last November to gather key input and actions that we as a city should focus on.
 - 3. Race and social equity issues are real in Alexandria. Along with Jacqueline Tucker, I will be hosting a series of community conversations to identify root causes and innovative solutions.
- d. We must continue the conversations we started in 2020 around increased police transparency and accountability to the residents and what that should look like.
- e. In April, we adopted an ordinance to establish the structure of a new independent Community Policing Review Board (effective July 1st). This board will have the authority to receive concerns from the community regarding policing in Alexandria, review APD investigation of certain incidents and complaints, conduct investigations of complaints, and make recommendations on policing practices, policies, and procedures.
- f. I am in support of best practices like “drug courts”, because we’ve seen far too many disparities in our justice system that impact Black and Brown communities. We need to review current best practices.

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

- a. From my perspective, the top three issues facing our city are the COVID-19 recovery, housing affordability/stock and our aging infrastructure. Alexandria isn’t immune to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- b. Our economic recovery along with getting our kids back in school is top of mind. Ensuring kids return to 5-day in person learning safely based on science. I will work with ACPS to make certain this is achievable by fall.
- c. Tackling our aging infrastructure, particularly as it relates to housing, stormwater management, and school capacity, are our highest looming concerns and among my top priorities.
- d. Concerning housing, we must take a multi-pronged approach. As a member of the City Council, I’ve led on this issue and will continue to push for expanding public-private partnerships and holding developers more accountable for housing contributions is a start.

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

a. **Overall, infrastructure I believe is incredibly pressing.**

- i. Our **stormwater management** capacity is critically important right now. I support a collaborative approach to addressing inland and urban flooding including, Increasing Stormwater Local Assistance Fund and legislation at the State level to amend the existing authority granted to localities to establish a local Stormwater Management Fund, consisting of funds appropriated by the City, to include the authority to use the grant funds on private property for flood mitigation and protection measures with a clear public benefit, such as floodproofing and flood protection products, and grading. And this is a state issue, because a number of other communities across the state are experiencing similar challenges that Alexandria is.
- ii. **School capacity** and **affordable housing** continue to be regional challenges that we must address. In both regards, we must continue to think out the box and use a multi-pronged approach to handle these matters. For schools, we must look at multi-use opportunities at existing locations such as the Greenhill property. Concerning housing, we must be more demanding of developers when it comes to adding more affordable housing units to upcoming development opportunities like landmark mall.