

The Chamber/ALX – Sarah Bagley, Council Candidate Responses

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.*

I am seeking a seat on the Alexandria City Council because I have a proven commitment to community service and a personal and professional track record that makes me uniquely positioned to add value to our City Council in 2022. I was born and raised in Virginia Beach, Virginia and graduated from The College of William and Mary and after spending a few years working I moved to DC for law school where I stayed for 13 years and practiced law. In 2015, after making partner, I made a personal decision to leave the practice of law and begin working for an affordable housing non-profit where my responsibilities included building relevant social service programs for the residents of low-income housing communities.

I discovered Alexandria literally by going door to door and acting as a Precinct Captain, knocking hundreds if not more of doors each election session (primary and general) for our Democratic candidates at all levels of offices, local, state and national, and in doing so, I have heard the concerns and questions of thousands of Alexandrians over the years. That engagement work extends beyond Alexandria to contested seats around the Commonwealth, to Georgia where I did ballot curing work in the special Senate race and to North Carolina where I did 10 days of ballot curing in the Presidential race.

When I had an opportunity to join and then become the Local Event Lead for Moms Demand Action in Alexandria, a gun violence prevention organization, I committed myself fully to the position. Hosting Farmers Markets tables talking to Alexandrians about the issue, attending advocacy sessions in Richmond, Capitol Hill and speaking before our own City Council on the issue. I connected with dozens of local Alexandria businesses to partner and promote the national Wear Orange campaign to raise awareness about the impacts of gun violence on survivors and communities. That proven commitment to putting in the work locally and on issues I am passionate about are values I would bring to the City Council.

My education in the law and years of experience as a trial lawyer, prepare me to ask critical questions, look for positions based in fact, and advocate for those who need strong voices to represent their interests. My legal experience also includes hours and hours of negotiation and getting the necessary players to a table where they can hash out a solution that everyone understands and can support.

In my current role with an affordable housing non-profit, those skills still apply, however now I use them towards larger community goals versus that of an individual client. I have helped create programs in low-income housing communities around the country serving a diverse range of populations in places ranging from the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, to Southwest Atlanta, to rural South Carolina and New Americans in Fargo, North Dakota. At work I listen to and address problems from food insecurity, workforce development, transportation barriers, language and technology challenges and childcare needs. Crafting solutions to those challenges requires broad, creative and unique solutions. The insight and experiences I've gained from these personal and professional experiences, along with my affection for Alexandria as my chosen

home make me an ideal candidate for our City Council. I will bring these skills to bear as we address pressing issues before our City including COVID recovery, housing affordability, investment in infrastructure including transportation, water and sewer, and insuring Alexandria remains a safe, inclusive, and desirable place to live for generations.

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

As with the pandemic itself, we should hesitate to presume we know exactly what the recovery will look like for the business community and our community at large. We must continue to fund and support flexible programs that allow businesses to make their own decisions about the best way to survive and adapt to changing business conditions. We must be conscious of the fact that not every restaurant can move outside, that not all businesses can negotiate with their landlords (or that some landlords cannot financially make concessions to tenants without financial support of their own) and that some industries may never operate in the same manner again as they did pre-COVID. We should begin engagement now with businesses about how they are budgeting and planning for the year(s) ahead and presume that things will not automatically return to pre-COVID conditions. As workers modify their work habits long term, social and shopping habits change, businesses will continue to need flexible and efficient responses from local government and the distribution of any supportive funding and services, including perhaps rethinking our commercial spaces and zoning considerations that may expand their use moving forward. Given that our hospitality industry does not expect 2022 to immediately return to the levels it was at immediately pre-COVID, we need to design programs and supports that will ensure our businesses survive through the prolonged tail end of the pandemic. Crucially, we want to avoid a scenario where we take stock in two to three years and realize what we lost were primarily small, minority or female owned, or local businesses because our outreach was insufficient in those areas and for those with the smallest financial cushion to continue through the economic recovery.

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?

The modifications of the 100 Block of King Street appears to be a success and we should consider maintaining that change as long as it is feasible for the businesses and traffic patterns in the area. Where possible we should consider additional areas where pedestrian access and outdoor eating and shopping can be accommodated, particularly as a way to increase support for West End businesses. Additionally, the option of ordering alcohol to go may be a good long term revenue source for local restaurants though it will be up to those establishments to indicate whether they are finding that service to be profitable once full seating is allowed again and visitors are traveling to Alexandria. Curbside pickup parking modifications may need fresh examination as we emerge from the pandemic and re-establish tourism and local dining habits. Where parking is already limited, when dining habits resume, we may need to evaluate the ongoing need for those dedicated spaces relative to their use as two- or three-hour parking options, along with the revenue those spaces create for the City. Ultimately though, our response

to the pandemic has shown that creativity and flexibility are vital to businesses adapting to new environments and we should not dismiss these creative approaches and pilot efforts moving forward and out of the pandemic.

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?*

To be more inclusive, we must first understand exactly who our business community is and what they view as their most pressing needs. From a business perspective, we need to work harder from a data gathering and outreach perspective to understand who are the female, minority, and small business owners in the community and how are we serving/underserving them? We cannot properly support and uplift those businesses until we have an accurate understanding of who and where they are and the nature of support they need from their local government. We cannot rely on passive surveys and geographically based business organizations alone to inform our policy choices. We must recognize that parts of our community may have not an established advocacy group (either for business or civic interests) but may still need City resources. Therefore, we must develop and provide foundational support for organizations that can speak for and represent previously unrepresented voices. Our communication efforts as a City and in organizations like AEDP and Visit Alexandria, must be broad and creative and designed to encourage feedback from those who may not have traditionally had a voice or representation in these organizations. Our marketing, banking, and business development communities, need to proactively seek out owners who they have not worked with before and who may not be aware of the supportive tools available to them and those efforts must be done in the relevant languages and using all available tools, including print, social media, mail, phone calls and in person visits. Until we identify the full diversity of our business community (or those interested in becoming members but for institutional challenges that may have existed/continue to exist) we cannot truly represent and serve them. As we have housing programs designed to encourage ownership and provide financial literacy, we should make similar programs widely available to those looking to become business owners in Alexandria. We should market those programs in our high schools and community colleges, in internship programs and labor organizations, and in our community spaces to maximize the range of citizens who are aware of and encouraged to participate. We must proactively invite people who may have previously felt excluded to these opportunities or lack the networking connections that are so often crucial to starting a new business or entering a new profession.

5. *City Issues: What do you feel are the three (3) most pressing issues facing the City of Alexandria today?*

To continue to be the inclusive and desirable place to live and work, Alexandria needs to continue broadening its base of revenue amongst a diverse commercial and real estate owning base that will allow us to invest in key infrastructure and supportive services include ongoing COVID recovery. We must increasingly recognize that our primary issues; (1) creating and

supporting safe, inclusive, affordable communities (2) addressing aging infrastructure (covering a broad range of investments including schools, sewage and stormwater, parks and broadband) so that our City remains a desirable place for residents and businesses, and (3) environmental protections (with policies aimed toward renewable energy, frequent electric public transit, and green building design and open spaces) are all connected. We can no longer afford to see these as competing interests for limited budget allotments and policy approaches but rather overlapping and interacting challenges that require holistic solutions. To be a viable choice moving forward for businesses and households, we need housing affordability options, school systems and city services that deliver on expectations, and an emphasis on clean air, water, and energy in all of our planning and policy choices.

6. *State and Regional Issues: – What do you feel are the most pressing state and regional issues effecting Alexandria?*

The need to take clear action on environmental issues, including reducing emissions and shifting increasingly to renewable energy sources, will require a cooperative approach between state and local governments in our region. To best lower single occupant vehicle miles driven and increase options for low-income households, we need to coordinate our transportation solutions with regional partners and pursue available state level funding for investments in our infrastructure and transportation needs. We should work closely with state and regional partners to improve safe, frequent, and affordable connective transportation between area cities and counties. Given the ongoing impact of the pandemic, it will be increasingly important that we encourage visits between our regional partners to support our businesses and hospitality industries as national and international travel will likely remain slow to resume at its pre-pandemic levels. By improving and increasing connectivity between our regional partners, we can also reduce emissions, lower transportation costs and barriers for low-income households to participate in the economy and workforce and encourage people to consider public transit options (including bike and pedestrian pathways) thus improving quality of life throughout the region.