



## 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@thechamberlx.com](mailto:mciarrocchi@thechamberlx.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.**

I'm running for City Council because I want to build an Alexandria where our future is brighter than our present. I first came to Alexandria to run State Senator Adam Ebbin's 2011 campaign. I immediately fell in love with this community. I live on the West End of the city with my husband, Jason. I currently serve as the Chief of Staff to Congressman Mark Takano, a leading progressive in the US House of Representatives. During my time in Alexandria I've looked for ways to give back, and I've served as the Chair of the Alexandria Economics Opportunities Commission and I'm currently a member of the Budget and Financial Affairs Advisory Committee. These experiences have helped to shape my perspective about the challenges we face as a city. With the city beginning to recover from the pandemic, the next council will need to continue to respond quickly. I feel that my experience at the local, state, and federal level have prepared me to serve on city council.

Our city has a unique opportunity to build a future for everyone, regardless of race, creed, color, or sexual orientation. The near future holds much promise for our city, and with new investments like the redevelopment of Landmark Mall and the emergence of Amazon's HQ2, we will be able to grow our local economy and continue to create jobs for Alexandrians while retaining Alexandria's unique charm. So many people know Alexandria because of its

historical sites, and I'll work to protect Alexandria's character and its open spaces, while supporting the investments we need to help us achieve a more prosperous future for all city residents.

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

With millions in federal funding coming towards Alexandria from the American Rescue Plan (and the potential for further federal dollars to come down through the American Jobs Plan), the next council will be in a unique position to decide the direction of our growing city. If elected, I'll seek to use our recovery as an opportunity to address long standing infrastructure problems such as traffic and flooding, to give new and existing businesses the support they need to succeed, to raise the standards we expect of city contractors and developers, and to empower working Alexandrians and protect them from abuses such as wage theft and payroll fraud. I will work hard to ensure that the council supports our local businesses and does all it can to revive Alexandria's economy. By prioritizing our residents and directly investing in our city, we can build our economy back even better than it was before.

**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 believe that local businesses adapted incredibly well when it came to higher levels of sanitation, the delivery of alcoholic beverages by restaurants, and new outdoor seating zones (such as the one on King Street); I would like for these changes to become permanent fixtures in Alexandria. As we build back from the impact of the pandemic I think it's important to keep an open dialogue with local businesses to ensure that they have the flexibility they need to innovate and serve our community.

Business owners and their employees have been resilient in the face of the recent challenges and have innovated in incredible ways during the pandemic, but I believe that capacity restrictions on businesses and moratoriums on large events should be rolled back as a larger percentage of residents receive their COVID-19 vaccines. The sooner we can ensure Alexandrians are protected against the virus, the sooner we can get them back to work and school.

**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?**

If elected to Council, I will work closely with our new equity officer to bridge the many equity gaps that exist within our city. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the deep inequities that exist in Alexandria. Minority-owned businesses were amongst the hardest hit by the economic downturn. Many of our most diverse neighborhoods also have the least access to broadband internet, limiting the ability of students to do their homework, for workers to do their jobs remotely, and even of residents to sign up for vaccination appointments. As we rebuild from the pandemic, we need to address the systemic issues that made this crisis worse for communities of color.

As a gay Alexandrian, I am proud that our city received a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index for our policies protecting the LGBTQ community. I hope to continue to find ways to take concrete action to support equity and inclusion. If elected, I will work alongside our equity officer to continue the dialogue around the intersecting challenges posed by racism, financial insecurity, and our city's complicated history. By creating a city where everyone is heard, embraced, and treated with dignity and respect, we can build an Alexandria that thrives for everyone.

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

Despite Alexandria beginning to pull out of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our residents are still struggling with the financial impact of being out of work for so long, and many owe extensive delayed rent payments. Many of our local businesses have been shuttered by the prolonged crisis, and even more have seen their incomes slashed. The work of helping our families, students and businesses recover will dominate much of the next city council term. If elected, I plan to build back our city by working with our local businesses to give them the support they need to succeed, by making sure Alexandria is the easiest place in Northern Virginia to create a new business, by supporting our schools and providing students with the extra help they'll need after more than a year of distance learning, and by supporting our public safety net so that we don't leave families behind in this recover. Further, I will prioritize investment in city infrastructure like municipal broadband and repairing our city's outdated stormwater management system. If the next council properly invests in our residents and our city, Alexandria will shake off the effects of the pandemic and once again thrive.

Further, I plan to prioritize the repair of our stormwater management system. As significant flooding problems currently plague Alexandrians in Old Town, Del Ray, and other parts of the

city, we need to mobilize all available resources to mitigate spot flooding and address larger capacity issues, which is why I strongly support the city's plan. However, I wish to go even further than the current city repair plan. I want to work with the ad-hoc citizen oversight committee to ensure that work is progressing rapidly, that the funds raised by the increased stormwater fee are being spent efficiently, and that any newly-identified flooding problems are added to the project to allow us to effectively stop the flooding that plagues our businesses and homes. I also would work to find ways to bring outside dollars to bear on this issue, particularly the capacity side of the problem, so that we can expedite that work and potentially reduce costs to local taxpayers.

Finally, if elected to city council I will be a tireless advocate for Alexandria's public schools. We must diversify and expand our city's tax base to ensure that our schools have the funding they need to help our students succeed, particularly as students are returning to school after the pandemic and may need extra help to catch up. Further, we must ensure that space for schools remains a priority when making land use decisions in the city. I will work to improve communication between the city and the schools in this regard, so that ACPS is better looped-in and able to make the case for educational facilities.

By ensuring that residents can find housing that meets their budget, send their kids to fully funded schools, access reliable public transportation, and improve broadband access, city council can support our residents in their time of need. If elected in November, I will ensure that it does.

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

The biggest immediate issue impacting our commonwealth and region is the COVID-19 pandemic and the financial crisis it has brought. Working with local community leaders, local businesses, and the state and federal governments to make our residents whole and to replace the jobs we lost will dominate the work of every level of government over the next year or more.

The largest long term challenge impacting Virginia and NOVA will be climate change. We're feeling the impact of the changing climate here in Alexandria, where increasingly-frequent large rain events are overwhelming our inadequate stormwater sewer system. If elected to council, I will work to create connections with other localities that are being impacted by climate change so that we can put organized pressure on our state and federal representatives to provide support to ameliorating the impacts of climate change and taking steps to reduce carbon emissions.