

**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.**

Hi! I'm James Lewis and I'm running for Alexandria City Council to ensure that all voices are heard so the best and brightest ideas move forward for our future.

I always say that I'm an Alexandrian by choice. I moved to this City because it was dynamic, vibrant and reflected my values. It was a place that I wanted to live in and serve. So, I immediately got involved with the Young Democrats, Democratic Committee and Alexandria-Caen Sister City Committee. A few years later, I wanted to do more and was appointed to the Traffic and Parking Board. Over the last 7 and a half years, I'm proud of the work we've done going block-by-block through the City to address safety and access issues.

Now, I'm running for City Council to continue working with neighbors on all issues so we can improve our community for everyone. As a PR pro for the last decade, I want to bring my experience reaching and engaging underserved communities, so our City policies reflect our true needs while we plan for a still brighter future.

We're home to many of the nation's best and brightest. Let's lean into that advantage so we can develop the innovative solutions that our future demands.

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

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has been hard on all businesses, especially those in the hospitality industry. On Council, I would want to undertake a three-prong strategy to build back our economic and business base to be stronger than ever.

1) Continue and expand business-support services for businesses. Events like Restaurant Week, Shop Local and the Carry-Out Pledge are simple ways to engage Alexandrians in supporting our local businesses while building a greater sense of community that benefits us all. Additionally, many businesses have found ways to expand, grow, change and adapt during this pandemic, especially by expanding into the online space. We need to maintain a robust network of services until at least 2024 that support businesses recovering or opening after the pandemic.

2) Expand our investment in tourism and business event marketing. Visit Alexandria and others have done a great job before and throughout the pandemic. Let's increase our investment in a proven revenue generator for the City. Additionally, I believe people will want to travel after being trapped at home for a year-plus. Let's ensure that they come to Alexandria.

3) We need to find ways to incubate more small and diverse businesses in Alexandria. Many businesses were unable to survive the pandemic but could be revived with some assistance. Additionally, we know that COVID-19 has created new opportunities for new business who will face a tight capital market and need assistance with opening their doors. Cities around the nation have found success with these incubator spaces, especially for food service and technology. We should model that success where possible.

**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 think we need to look at all the flexibilities, what worked best and how to we expand what's working. At present, nothing seems in need of rolling back.

One area that I'm personally interested in expanding is outdoor dining. As a member of the Traffic and Parking Board, we worked on the parklet program that became outdoor dining during COVID. This has become a local favorite and win for businesses. Let's determine how best to keep and expand it.

**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?**

First, I look forward to the RSEO's report because we need experts to stand outside the system and take stock of the realities for us. Second, I think we need to create venues where the City is proactively reaching out to diverse stakeholders, especially women and LGBTQ+ business owners and business owners of color. If we are not consciously and aggressively reaching out, we know that we will miss their voices. I want to use my experience as communications director to two Members of the Congressional Black Caucus to develop these venues and lines of communication.

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

1) Flood prevention and mitigation – businesses and homes shouldn't flood when it rains and we need an infrastructure that's capable of managing the impacts of climate change-driven extreme weather.

2) COVID-19 response and recovery – from our businesses to COVID-19 learning gaps, we need to address the impacts of COVID-19 across our City.

3) Public engagement – we need to ensure that all voices on heard, including the single mom working two jobs who doesn't have time to follow e-news and take online surveys. We need to find better ways to reach and meet Alexandrians where they are so our policies reflect the needs of all.

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

Broadband access is the most pressing state and regional issue. At present, families and businesses have one provider. State laws and regional dynamics make it difficult to create more competition in this critical service market so businesses can innovate the future here in Alexandria.