

Alexandria Chamber of Commerce Survey

Submitted by Allison Silberberg

April 30, 2021

INTRODUCTION - Please introduce yourself and describe why you are seeking to be Mayor of the City of Alexandria. For this question you are welcome to submit a brief video.

My decision to run for Mayor comes from my love of our city that I have called home since 1989 -- for more than half my life. I have a lifelong history of public service work. I had the honor to serve as an intern for Senator Ted Kennedy, and I worked for Senator Lloyd Bentsen on the Hill. Through my experience working with public policy and on behalf of constituents, I knew that I could make a difference through a life of public service. I launched and managed a nonprofit that helped youth in Anacostia and served on our city's Economic Opportunities Commission for eight years and chaired it. I brought my passion for civic duty with me to the Council, serving as Vice Mayor and then Mayor. My greatest accomplishments as Mayor included: tripling the dedicated funding for the Affordable Housing Fund; leading the approval of the long-delayed plan to resolve sewage issues for all four outfalls into the Potomac River; securing the \$1 billion Virginia Tech Innovation Campus; approving and building two new public schools (Patrick Henry and Ferdinand T. Day), plus a new wing at John Adams -- all on the West End; initiating and drafting our city's Statement on Inclusiveness, garnering national attention; creating a Racial Equity Office, and establishing the Clergy Council and the Senior Advocacy Roundtable. In Alexandria, a commitment to working with and listening to the people, civic associations, and businesses is crucial to our success and quality of life. But now, we are at an inflection point. In the last two years, we have experienced three devastating floods with sewage and stormwater, over-stressed infrastructure, out-of-scale overbuilding, and a proposal to put housing on our limited school properties. These issues along with a repeated lack of transparency and a lost trust that our residents have in our local government have propelled me to run for Mayor. As Mayor, I will continue to build upon my accomplishments and serve as the leader who will listen, take action, and restore the public trust.

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

I am very optimistic about our economic recovery. As the CDC relaxes restrictions on tourism, indoor dining, and daily activities, economic recovery in Alexandria will mean businesses fully opening and engaging in robust commerce. The massive infusion of federal funds to our city and our businesses will help our recovery to be expedited. We must ensure that ALL our businesses are made aware of the federal funds to which they are entitled. One of the important programs

that our businesses should access is the Small Business Credit Initiative, which will provide collateral support, facilitate loan participation, and enable credit guarantee programs. Another important program is the Employee Retention Credit and Paid Leave Credit program, which provides tax credits for employers to offset their current payroll tax liabilities, and take dollar-for-dollar tax credits on wages up to \$5,000 if they offer paid leave to employees who are sick or quarantining. Prior to the pandemic, our retail sector was suffering due to the increase in online shopping. We saw this happening with the loss of such treasured local stores such as “Why Not.” We must assist local businesses to create events that will draw shoppers back, as well as help them with digital marketing and maintaining a strong digital presence. I will also work and coordinate with local business associations such as Old Town Boutique District, West End Business Association, the Del Ray Business Association, and the Upper King Street Neighborhood Association to assist with these initiatives. Beyond collaboration, the City in coordination with Visit Alexandria must use available federal funds to aggressively advertise that Alexandria is definitely open for business and welcoming for visitors. Our hospitality industry has been decimated during the pandemic, and we need to do all we can to boost this sector as the pandemic eases. A healthy Alexandria is an Alexandria that has a multitude of diverse, small businesses, a robust tourism industry, and a thriving economy.

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 am proud of the creativity that businesses have shown as they have had to pivot quickly during the pandemic. The relaxed regulations regarding street dining and alcohol beverages-to-go have helped many restaurants survive the pandemic. I would be in favor of allowing these regulations to continue at least through 2021 and then re-evaluate them. As Mayor, I will have ongoing conversations with business owners in all areas of our city to ensure that the relaxed regulations are preferred and have not adversely impacted non-restaurant businesses due to the loss of parking with on-street dining. I would continue the sectioning off of the 100 block of King Street for restaurants. I have also noticed that some businesses in other areas of the city have not been able to take advantage of such relaxed regulations, such as the restaurants in the Bradlee Center. I will want to ensure that city policies are evenly applied throughout our city. One foreseeable change I would implement would be in the gradual elimination of reserved parking for takeout. As COVID eases, people will resume dining in, and more parking would be a benefit. Additionally, this would help the struggling restaurants and retail businesses and their employees that are in desperate need of an increase in customers.

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?

As Mayor, I am proud to have supported the creation of the Race and Social Equity Office and the hiring of a Race and Social Equity Officer. I understood the structural discrimination that is present throughout our country and that we needed to address these issues here in Alexandria in a proactive way. COVID laid bare many of the health and economic inequities throughout our community. My first priority will be to bring together the Race and Social Equity Officer and the Small Business Development Center to work in tandem and create a public campaign to ensure that minority-owned businesses have the information and resources to request all federal, state, or city aid, to which they are entitled. Clearly, there have been barriers to receiving and processing information for some businesses in areas outside of our core business districts, and outreach efforts must focus on these areas as well. I am also in favor of reopening our public schools, as the transition to virtual learning has revealed the harsh inequities some families have at home. The inability to have an environment at home that is conducive to learning is an example of educational inequity. Finally, I would advocate for fixing the issues regarding inequitable broadband coverage by working with telecommunication companies to bring Internet competition to Alexandria and utilizing resources allocated by the American Rescue Plan to increase affordable access to the Internet.

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

The three most pressing issues facing the City of Alexandria are sewage and stormwater flooding, out-of-scale overbuilding, and restoring transparency and ethics in our government.

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

Alexandria is a city that deals with three primary issues concerning our regional area. First, regionally, we deal with traffic congestion due to daily commuters from Alexandria and the greater Northern Virginia region into and out of Washington D.C. Secondly, the proximity of the different jurisdictions of the DMV leads to workforce competition for police, EMTs, firefighters, and other human talent. This results not only in a shortage of skilled workers but also places a

financial strain to outcompete our neighbors. Third, as the Washington area, and in particular Northern Virginia, continue to grow, there is a dearth of affordable and workforce housing that results in people getting priced out of Alexandria's housing market. The biggest state issue affecting Alexandria is the Dillon Rule. The rule limits the power of local governments to address many of the issues that go unaddressed from the General Assembly. With the Dillon Rule, there are many situations where the Council does not have the ability to make decisions for Alexandria.