

# Annetta Catchings Chamber Of Commerce Questionnaire.

## 1.. Introduction (Video)

2.. As a Flight Attendant I have worked throughout this entire pandemic. I took no leave of absences nor did I initially have the necessary tools to protect myself from the virus. I saw first hand - what seemed at the time - to be a slow adjustment to the pandemic. Aside from the many deaths and separation from loved ones, what was most difficult to watch was the devastating effect the lockdown had on small businesses which employs almost 50% of the private workforce. Governors making themselves arbitrators over whose businesses were essential and not. Family businesses destroyed, followed by the pain employers felt in having to turn away workers who would prefer work over government aid.

At present, Alexandria has established best practices. It is well into the application phase of vaccinating its citizens. Alexandria has controlled its Covid numbers, its hospitalization and deaths, despite growing crowds in the city weekend after

weekend. The city should stay true to its own declaration not to impede on the rights of businesses to compete in a free market to sustain its own growth. With regards to the economic implications, the city promises to work to “remove unfunded mandates” from local government. Alexandria should declare itself open for business and allow the customer to decide what their comfort level is when supporting a business or establishment. Federal money that is reserved for small business recovery (PPP) should be made available through the various recovery PPP programs.

In that same vein, we should declare our schools open for business! The city supports legislation that provides an atmosphere where kids are healthy and thriving. We know from the science that kids are generally very resilient when it comes to Covid 19 and, on average, experience more setbacks from the flu. This prolonged debate about school reopening has caused our kids to academically drop further and further behind. Not to mention the harm it is doing to their social development. Juvenile delinquency crime is up as well. As our local system struggles to provide our vulnerable kids, those who crossover between human health

services and juvenile justice systems, the alternatives they need to prosper, they too are left without a sufficient safety-net during this school lockdown period. Some are floundering and making poor decisions that will stay with them for life.

3.. NONE AT THIS TIME.

4.. Blacks make up 21% of the population in Alexandria. I believe that we must assist and promote businesses that are owned by members from our minority communities. At present there are still very few black owned businesses in Alexandria. I would be very interested in working with our Social and Equity Officer to come up with creative ways on how we can further promote those minority businesses by having them feed into more established ones. I also look forward to finding ways to increase the presence of black owned businesses in areas such as Old Town. There is but only one way to establish an ongoing partnership with those entrepreneurs and residents, and that is by diligently seeking

opportunities to cultivate a partnering work environment with the city's Race and Social Equity Officer and the community itself. Regular sessions throughout the year where council members and myself would meet to do what I would call a check-in analysis on what the evolving needs are in the community. Although many of our communities have civic organisations that have full on engagement with City Hall and City Council members, the goal is to ignite that level of participation from all our neighbourhoods over time. As Mayor, I would create the space for honest and reflective dialogue with the Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Black community that extends beyond the normal forums where grievances would typically take place. The topics should center around the following: maintaining safe and healthy communities and what that looks like in our city. Making sure that our kids are maintaining competitive test scores and performance in school. Getting more parents to join the PTA and partner with the children's instructors. Summer initiatives and internship programs for young adults and high schoolers. Civic and volunteer work during the summer. Scholarships and mentorship programs that offer after school

tutoring and job interview training. I would also hope that home ownership and resources to assist with business start-up costs and expectations would be a top concern as well.

### 5.. (3) Pressing issues facing Alexandria:

(1) A lack of diverse revenue sources to cover basic costs associated with managing the city and its infrastructural needs as well as additional expenditures.

(2) It is becoming increasingly more unaffordable to live in Alexandria. Alexandria loses 50% of its residents every 7 years. The primary reason may very well be due to increasing market rate rent and property taxes. Everything from gas to groceries to eating out cost more in Alexandria. This is driving out the middle class who are more likely to own. While at the same time, creating a younger more transient population who are - for the most part - more apt to rent.

(3) Density!!

6....The most Pressing State and Regional issue effecting Alexandria.

1. (High corporate taxes) Virginia has a combined corporate tax rate of 25.7% . Speaking with small business owners in Alexandria, it is clear that almost half of their revenue go towards various federal, local and state taxes. We must find ways to make it profitable for small businesses to compete with the bigger outfits.
2. (Underperforming schools) If middle class families are forced to choose between good schools and good living location, they will choose good schools every time, especially given that workers are on a hybrid model post pandemic. They can live further away from the city, enroll in better schools or better afford a private one and procure a bigger home with backyards and green space.
3. Crime.. Drugs, human trafficking and a culture that calls for defunding the police and decriminalizing “nuisance” crimes is a growing concern and problem for most urban cities. Criminals are being released earlier from prison while some never see one day behind locked cells.

4. The legalisation of marijuana has the potential to really lower the quality experience that our visitors are seeking when visiting our city.