

## **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, [mciaarocchi@thechamberalx.com](mailto:mciaarocchi@thechamberalx.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.**

Hi, I'm Councilman Canek Aguirre and I'm running for re-election. For those who don't know me, I'm originally from LA, both my parents immigrated here from Mexico and I graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill. I dropped anchor in the Port City in 2011 and began what is now almost a decade of service to Alexandria residents. I started off serving students and families in Alexandria City Public Schools for three years which provided the opportunity to explore and learn the different neighborhoods in our community and work with a variety of non-profits and City agencies.

This was especially useful for two major events in my first term, the Census and our COVID response. I successfully led the City's 2020 Census efforts to achieve a 100% count securing millions of dollars in federal funding for our roads, schools, businesses and families for the next decade. During the pandemic I made sure our limited resources were placed where they were needed most. This is why Alexandria needs proven leadership to guide us through an equitable recovery and to make meaningful investments in our infrastructure future. To get involved with my campaign, visit [canekforcouncil.com](http://canekforcouncil.com). I hope to earn your vote by June 8th!

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

One of the biggest issues facing our City, and honestly the nation, is how do we help to ensure an equitable recovery from the impacts of COVID-19. I believe our business community plays a big role in this. It is critical that we not only continue to put our limited resources where they are

needed most, but that we also provide the appropriate support to residents and businesses to ensure that they thrive.

A good example of this is the flexibility the City has shown in adjusting regulations for restaurants to have outdoor seating. I also believe there needs to be an emphasis on how the City identifies and does outreach to SWaM businesses that were most impacted by COVID-19 to ensure they have access to capital, procurement opportunities, and other resources.

In my first term, I have made language access a priority to ensure the City better serves Alexandria's diverse community. I pushed for the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP) to change their outreach efforts to ensure more businesses were aware of the opportunity to apply for Alexandria Back to Business grants. I am very happy to say that because of my direct efforts, AEDP has hired a new associate who will be focused on targeted outreach to SWaM businesses and make sure they are aware of programs and resources. I am also very proud that as a City we are beginning to capture data on race/ethnicity, gender and other key data points that will enable us to have a better understanding of our business community and identify gaps/needs to ensure a diverse and 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 a fan of the street outdoor dining option and the pedestrian space at the foot of King Street. I believe both of these changes have been popular with customers and helped businesses keep their doors open. Presently, there isn't anything that stands out that I would want to roll back.

**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?**

From working with the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP), Visit Alexandria, the City's Finance Department and just hitting the pavement myself, I have been extremely active in this area. Since I was sworn into office in 2019, I have been pushing the City's Finance Department to do a review of our procurement process and identify ways to include more SWaM businesses. At the onset of pandemic closures, Visit Alexandria had a really great interactive site highlighting businesses that were still open to encourage residents and visitors to buy local. The majority of the businesses, however, were located in Del Ray and Old Town and I felt that other businesses in the City were being left out. I worked with Visit Alexandria and

within days the site also featured a significant number of businesses in Arlandria and the West End. This has led Visit Alexandria to highlight some of these businesses in their annual report, in addition to further discussions as to how to reach a broader audience.

In preparation for the roll out of the Alexandria Back to Business (B2B) grant program, I successfully pushed for multilingual communications and advocated to AEDP to work in conjunction with the Finance Department to help ensure a higher level of engagement/outreach to businesses across the city. While we have data about who participated in the B2B program, it is difficult to truly grade ourselves without a baseline. As a result, the City's Finance Department, in conjunction with AEDP, is identifying ways to track more data so that moving forward there is a fuller picture of Alexandria's diverse business community.

During the application period, I personally visited businesses across the City to make sure owners knew about the B2B program and how to apply. The majority of businesses I visited had no idea what I was talking about, but I connected them to the application and the multilingual resources on AEDP's website and helped to troubleshoot any questions they may have had. I know that I am directly responsible for over \$200,000 of Back to Business grants being awarded to many of our SWaM businesses.

Additionally, due to my advocacy, AEDP recently filled another staff position that will be focused on targeted outreach to SWaM businesses. While I don't mind pulling up my sleeves and doing the work, I am very pleased that AEDP acknowledges the importance that this position brings in helping to ensure we are proactively capturing and serving as a resource to all of our diverse businesses.

If re-elected, I will continue to work to ensure an equitable recovery remains one of the City's highest priorities and work with our Race and Social Equity Officer to find ways to make our City more inclusive.

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

**Equitable COVID-19 Recovery** - As we continue to recover, it will be important that we do not return to business as usual and work to address the disparities that COVID highlighted.

**Investment in Infrastructure** - I believe we need increased investments in our infrastructure which includes our sanitary and stormwater sewers to address flooding; City and school buildings to address capacity and work conditions; and our multimodal transportation to fix roads, improve streets, and increase access to public transit.

**Increasing Housing Opportunities** - No matter your age or socioeconomic status we all need a safe place to live. I believe a sustainable, vibrant economy makes space for all. Whether you are a CEO, a dishwasher, a college student coming back home after graduation, or a senior on

a fixed income wanting to age in place, I remain committed to increasing housing opportunities across the City.

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

**Equitable COVID-19 Recovery** - While the increase in vaccinations has helped us provide more relief, we will be dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 for a number of years. We need to be able to go after State and Federal money that will aid us in our recovery and to make our business community aware of any opportunities as well. This is why thoughtful, proven leadership is needed now more than ever on City Council to help City staff, residents and businesses continue to navigate an equitable recovery.

**Transportation** - From increasing access to public transportation to reducing cut-through traffic, regional collaboration is essential to addressing transportation challenges many communities experience. During my first term, I have supported efforts to make critical investments in our transportation future and more affordable, efficient options to move people and goods. I currently serve as Vice Chair of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, Chair of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board's Access for All Advisory Committee which aims to give a voice to people traditionally underserved by our region's transportation system, and as an alternate on the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Board of Directors.

If-re-elected, I will continue to ensure Alexandria has a strong voice on regional transportation issues and advocate for increased investments in public transportation and equitable distribution of alternative modes of transportation such as Capital Bikeshare and scooters to reduce emissions and address "last mile" challenges.

**Housing** - Affordable housing units are disappearing across the country and in the City of Alexandria. The pandemic has further exacerbated the housing crisis as many families are now facing possible eviction. In March 2020, I proposed a public-private task force to address the impending eviction crisis which led to the formation of the City's Eviction Prevention Task Force. In April 2020, my resolution calling for a moratorium on rent, mortgages and suspension of negative credit reporting to keep families in their homes and businesses open passed unanimously. The Northern Virginia Regional Commission passed a similar resolution based off of the one we passed in Alexandria. In my first term, I have voted in support of accessory dwelling units and new development that provides a variety of housing opportunities for Alexandria residents to maintain a diverse workforce and help sustain economic growth.

**State Flexibility** - During my first term, I have worked with our State Delegation to identify possible exemptions to the Dillon Rule that will allow for alternative revenue streams that are needed to address our unique challenges in Alexandria. In order to address the City's current and future needs, we will need additional autonomy from Richmond.