

NAACP Candidate Questionnaire

Completed by Ryan McElveen, Candidate for Chairman of the Board of Supervisors

I. Supervisors

1. Will you support the renaming Robert E. Lee High School? (For School Board candidates “support” means voting to change the name?)

Yes. Based on School Board policy, beginning the process for a name change requires that an at-large School Board member sign on in support of the district Board member in whose district the school slated for a name change is located. At the time, I was the at-large member who partnered with Mason District member Sandy Evans in support of launching the Justice High School name change process, and I stood by her throughout that sometimes-difficult undertaking.

In 2018, I was proud to support the historic step of removing the name of a Confederate general from now-Justice High School, and I will continue to be a champion for name changes that are necessary for historical reasons like the name change of Robert E. Lee High School.

Prior to and during the Justice High School name change process, the members of the Board of Supervisors abdicated their responsibility as county stewards for both refusing to be part of a community conversation on name changes and refusing to take a stand on the Justice High School name change.

We need leaders in our county who are willing to stand up on behalf of our community members who are rightly tired of the Commonwealth’s inaction on the many remaining monuments to the Confederacy and, in by extension, the institution of slavery and a value system of white supremacy. I will be one of those leaders – and I am the only candidate in this race who has used my position as an elected official to further this important work.

2. What is your opinion of the current AAP program?

Fairfax County’s AAP program has many strengths, but also many pervasive weaknesses. The strengths of the program are rooted in its recognition as an international model for gifted education that includes a robust curriculum and pedagogical practices that prepare students for success in life. The weaknesses stem from the fact that this robust curriculum and pedagogical practices have not spread to all classrooms in the school system and, as a result, have left many students in our system without access to the benefits of the program.

I have been a strong voice on the School Board for expanding AAP curriculum and pedagogical practices to all of our schools and ensuring that all of our teachers have been trained in those instructional practices. The School Board began this effort with a pilot to

train our teachers to use these skills in Region 1, and we have outlined the expansion of the curriculum and training to all schools as part of the school system's Ignite strategic plan.

We currently perpetuate great disparities in the racial and socio-economic background of students who access AAP centers and are admitted to Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (TJHSST), thus leading to an inherently segregated system. While the expansion of AAP program curriculum and practices will provide more access to a rigorous program for all students, Fairfax needs to continue its efforts through the Young Scholars program and other mentorship programs in various disciplines to reach students from underrepresented populations. The School Board should schedule a periodic review of the TJHSST admission process every few years to ensure inclusivity of all populations. With the ongoing discussions in society about the impact of racial and socio-economic privilege in admissions to magnet schools and colleges, the time is ripe to revisit the conversation about the TJHSST admissions process.

3. Do you support the use of police body worn cameras? (For Supervisor candidates "support" means voting to fund use of body worn cameras for all Fairfax police)

Yes. I support the full and permanent adoption of Police Body Worn Camera program and will work to implement it countywide while also ensuring that the program helps to increase trust between the police and community and enhances police transparency and accountability.

At the same time, the County must institute a reporting mechanism to monitor the success of the program, residents must have access to recordings of police misconduct whenever possible, and cameras must not become weapons to target the residents they are meant to protect.

Recent research from George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy has shown that body cameras alone cannot be expected to improve police accountability, and that the cameras are only as successful as the departments in which they are instituted. For this reason, we must continue the reforms laid out by the Police Practices Review Commission so that a Police Body Worn Camera program can reach its full potential.

As Chairman, transparency and accountability from our police will be a top priority for Fairfax County. It is long overdue.

4. The county has determined a need for new housing to shelter 15,000 new families making less the \$70,000. Because of rising land and construction costs, new units in that price range require some form of public loans or grants. How many of these families should Fairfax County attempt to accommodate and how would you do it? What should happen to those who can find no affordable housing here?

Fairfax County should accommodate every resident who needs affordable housing. The goal should be that simple – to make it reality, we obviously have a long way to go.

As Chairman, I will invest in increasing the county's affordable housing stock to accommodate the 15,000 additional units that are deemed necessary. First, we need to both restore and increase the funding for affordable housing at the county level by increasing funding levels to \$0.02 on the tax rate. We also need to explore creative ways to address the shortage by considering building on both publicly-owned land and the private property of churches and other civic institutions.

Additionally, Fairfax County government needs to take an honest look at how its policies may be reinforcing and/or expanding the inequality by design or by circumstance our residents of color face when trying to purchase homes, continue to afford to live in their homes, or rent. And we can always do better at ensuring Fairfax County does not allow the continued rise in housing values to adversely affect communities already under stress.

5. Would you support increasing the power of the civilian review panel?

Yes, I would support increasing the power of both the Civilian Review Panel (CRP) and the Independent Police Auditor (IPA) to investigate Use of Force incidents, which will require the drafting and support of authorizing legislation. We must study the underlying causes of why Use of Force is applied disproportionately to the African American community, which is a particularly critical undertaking as our community is seeing a rise in hate crimes. Furthermore, I would advocate for the Sheriff Department to fall under the review of the CRP and IPA and for people stopped by the police be informed of the CRP and IPA at the time of arrest or citation. The creation of the CRP was an important start for our county, but we must continue to strengthen its power and oversight capabilities to maintain a positive relationship between police and the communities they serve.

As a School Board member, I proposed—and was successful in—adding a school system representative to the CRP to better address any potential misconduct in Use of Force by our School Resource Officers (SROs), and I believe we need to review the composition of the CRP from time to time to ensure it effectively represents our community. At the same time, just as I have sought to diversify the workforce in our schools, I will push to continue diversifying the police department so that it better mirrors the demographics of our community.

Again, as an outsider to the Board of Supervisors I look forward to advocating for more and better oversight of all functions of county government, but especially our police. I am also the only candidate who has experience in successfully implementing these types of changes.

6. What do you believe county should do to address the overcrowding in schools?

There are two things that need to be done by the county and the school system to address school overcrowding. The most urgent need is the allocation of additional capital bond funding from the county to the school system. The school system currently only receives an annual bond allocation of \$180 million, whereas the annual funding necessary for school buildings to reach the industry-standard 25-year replacement cycle and eliminate trailers would be \$273 million. For years, I have been a proponent of raising the bond cap. While my colleagues and I on the School Board were able to successfully advocate for an additional \$25 million in bond funding last year, we still have a long way to go.

This will require a reallocation of bond funding from other county capital priorities, which is fully merited. The Board of Supervisors needs to contribute to a side-by-side comparison of county building and school building replacement cycles. Both Boards should undertake a second iteration of the joint Board Infrastructure Financing Committee, and a comparison of county and school capital expenditures should be a primary focus of committee discussion.

7. Many jurisdictions have stopped prosecuting possession of marijuana, do you believe Fairfax County should adopt a similar policy?

Yes. Statistics show that, in many major cities, the enforcement of marijuana laws falls almost exclusively on African-Americans. Chicago, Manhattan, Philadelphia, and most recently Baltimore have all begun moving away from prosecuting for marijuana possession—and even moved to expunge old cases—to concentrate on more violent crimes. Fairfax should follow their lead.

By decriminalizing marijuana, we can focus more effort on rebuilding the trust between the police and our community, working to overcome a legacy of racial disparities in policing, and ultimately making our community safer as our residents become more willing to come forward to help solve violent crimes. Decriminalizing marijuana will also allow for community members who would otherwise be weighed down by a criminal record to face fewer hurdles when looking for work and housing, thus allowing our local economy to work for more people.

8. Many jurisdictions are ending the use of cash bail, what is your position on this issue?

I fully support ending cash bail. America has created a system of wealth-based (and racially-based) incarceration in which both nationwide jail admissions and lengths of stay have doubled over the past three decades. While poor people often have no resort when being locked up—except perhaps paying exorbitant fees to bail bondsmen—wealthy people can buy their way out of jail.

As we work to eliminate cash bail, however, we also need to ensure that we are creating a culture in which the justice system has a variety of alternatives to bail. During those same

three decades in which America's overall incarceration has vastly increased, New York City has seen the number of cases in which bail is set drop by half and its jail population drop by two-thirds. This has been the result of an organic effort to end cash bail while simultaneously providing judges with more alternatives to bail or incarceration. This system has resulted in more defendants showing up in court than the national average. Fairfax can draw upon this model and continue to enhance its programs like Diversion First for people with mental illness or developmental disabilities, whose issues are only exacerbated when they are unable to pay bail and sent to jail.

9. Do you believe that Amazon moving to the area will have a negative impact on Fairfax County? If so, please explain what should be done. If not, please explain.

While the economic impact of Amazon moving to the region will be positive for both the local economy and job growth, it will increasingly strain our county's ability to care for our most vulnerable populations and increase demands on our transportation infrastructure.

According to the Fuller Institute at George Mason University, one-third of Amazon employees are expected to live in Fairfax County (which I believe is an underestimation). By the laws of supply and demand, Amazon's arrival will increase housing costs and increase the number of cars on our roads. At the same time, in Fairfax we will not glean any of the tax income that Amazon will bring to Arlington.

As a matter of principal, we need to put the needs of our residents before the tax exemption desires of large corporations. In the case of Amazon, Arlington will reap benefits while Fairfax will pay a much higher proportion of the costs.

We need to turn our attention to the areas and the populations that will benefit from neither Amazon and a growing tech sector nor higher property values. We need all of our residents to have a voice. As Chairman, I will purposefully work to narrow that gap and provide more seats at the table, making sure that our county workforce, board and commission membership better reflect the demographics of our diversifying community.

10. What is the most important policy the County can promote or adopt to live up to the One Fairfax resolution?

Implementing universal pre-Kindergarten is the most important policy the County can promote to live up to the One Fairfax resolution. Despite years of lip service to the importance of early childhood education, the County has not made the necessary investments to ensure all of our children have access to pre-Kindergarten. Studies have shown that for every \$1 we invest in high quality early childhood education we get \$7 back in savings to society. Universal Pre-K is not just a moral and pedagogical imperative—it is a fiscal imperative, too.

11. When the Housing and Community Development office opened its housing choice voucher waiting list this winter, 12,000 people applied and 2,000 were chosen by lottery to be on a wait list of about 2 years. What should be done to assist the other 10,000 very low-income people who applied to the list?

Our county cannot just abandon the 10,000 very low-income people who lost out in the housing lottery, and we must ensure that those community members are able to put a roof over their head and prevent them from becoming homeless. To support them, our county must connect them with community and civic partner organizations that can find alternative housing placements and wrap-around services and advocate for and support both local funding increases for affordable housing programs and state increases in (and apportionment to Fairfax of) the Virginia Housing Trust Fund, which is a critical tool in addressing affordable housing in the Commonwealth.

Most importantly, I will advocate for a living wage for all workers in our community. Increasing wages for both our public and private sector employees is a priority for me. As a college student at the University of Virginia, I participated in the student-run Living Wage campaign, which, after more than a decade of advocacy, has finally received the support of University leadership. As a School Board member, I successfully worked to restore fair compensation for our teacher workforce. I believe that my actions throughout my career show my commitment to workers' rights and fair compensation, and as Chairman, I would continue this kind of advocacy. It will take political leadership to make this a reality, and I will bring energy and enthusiasm to the fight.

At a time of County revitalization and regeneration, we need to recognize the linkages between affordable housing, education, healthcare, transportation, and climate change, and use these linkages to fuel the co-location of services in our community and build upon the community schools movement.

Over the past eight years on the School Board, I've watched as development decisions were made by the Board that frustrate me, just like any other Fairfax resident. The development patterns that have been promoted by past Boards of Supervisors have led to the stark divides between the "haves" and "have nots" in Fairfax County, with some supervisor districts having a much greater proportion of affordable housing than others.

These kinds of development patterns have led to socio-economic "tipping points" in some of our schools and communities, which have in turn increased the strain on public services and community service organizations, which work harder and harder to overcome them.

Enclaves created for the benefit of richer, and white, residents are at the core of much of Fairfax's story. Many of us are unaware that Vienna, for example, has deep roots as a black community before being turned over to white government workers fleeing the city. We must dig further into how we got to where we are to figure out where we should be going as a county. This, of course, means that no one should feel like they live in a

bubble. Every inch of our great county should be considered for the same opportunities to better serve all of our residents.

12. A new survey shows there are 9,500 market rate housing units affordable to families making less than \$70K in Fairfax County. As land values rise driving rents up and many of these older units are turned into townhouses, we are in danger of losing affordable housing. The county policy is that there should be “no net loss, if possible” of affordable housing. What does “if possible” mean to you? To the county?

The “if possible” clause leaves the door open to the excuses that have been peddled by county leadership for years to excuse their inability to provide housing for our most vulnerable residents. As we look to expand our county’s affordable housing options, we must do a better job retaining our older, affordable residential units to ensure that we are not working at cross-purposes by simultaneously building and depleting our affordable housing stock.

Fairfax County’s supply of affordable housing is nowhere near large enough to accommodate demand today, and the neglect of investments in this critical infrastructure by the Board of Supervisors over the past few years has set us back further as we look to the future. We must ensure that our elders, special needs populations and workforce—from our public school, local government, police and fire employees to our retail and service sector employees—have access to affordable housing spread throughout our entire community.