



2021 Municipal General Elections Candidate Questionnaire

Please answer each of the following questions in 150 words or less. Orange County Affordable Housing Coalition (OCAHC) is a non-partisan association of organizations and individuals interested in affordable housing, and does not endorse candidates. Instead, OCAHC members will share the completed questionnaires from all candidates throughout our networks, including with local media and organizations that make endorsements. (If you do not return a completed questionnaire, we will note that when sending the questionnaires to our networks.) Our goal is to help voters make informed decisions to elect leaders who will prioritize the policies and resources needed to address our community's housing crisis.

Thank you in advance for completing this questionnaire. Should you have questions, please contact OCAHC Advocacy Committee Co-Chairs George Barrett (george@jacksoncenter.info) or Jackie Jenks (jjenks@ifcmailbox.org).

Please submit your completed questionnaire via email to ochousingcoalition@gmail.com by Saturday, September 25th at 12:00 pm.

1. Describe the current housing situation in our community. What are the main drivers of affordability challenges (property taxes, development types, lack of land, etc.)?

In Chapel Hill we face increasing property values and housing costs, rapid development of large apartment complexes with market rate rent, a lack of more affordable townhomes, duplex and triplex projects and the continuing growth of our largest employer, UNC, driving the need for student, staff and faculty housing. Chapel Hill voters in 2018 approved a \$10 million affordable housing bond, a substantial commitment for a community of our size. For example, Greensboro, with five times our population and a much larger tax base, only approved an affordable housing bond of \$25 million. Chapel Hill's bond has significantly helped efforts to keep housing affordable. Drivers of affordability challenges include the delay in moving quickly on affordable housing projects, the increased profitability of building market rate v. building affordable housing, the limitation of state funding for housing needs, and increasing construction and land costs as a result of the pandemic.

2. What is the most important role of an elected official/local government in ensuring all community members can afford housing?

I am not an expert on housing issues and I look forward to learning from other Council members, community advocates, staff and other experts about our affordable housing work. As Council members, our two primary duties are dealing with land use planning and setting our community priorities for our budget. We need to consider affordable housing as a primary issue in both areas. Our area is becoming so desirable, I think we can require private redevelopments to include more affordable housing units and we can move current housing projects along more quickly. We also must work to push our state and national officials to reverse decisions that mean many of our lower income residents are not financially secure without affordable health coverage, do not make a decent wage, and are unfairly burdened by our tax system – all additional reasons that make it hard to pay for housing.

3. What is your prior experience in creating and promoting affordable housing?

For over 25 years as a nonprofit attorney, I have worked for affordable health care for low income and vulnerable people through passing policies like Medicaid expansion, the Affordable Care Act and the Children's Health Insurance Program in North Carolina and around America. While I have been an advocate for social justice for years, I have not directly worked on housing issues. However, one of my proudest achievements was to work with partners in the Charlotte and Triangle areas to tell the stories of low-income families struggling with unpaid medical bills. [These folks were often being sued by the community hospitals they had gone to for life-saving treatment and ending up with liens on their very, very modest homes.](#) Our work helped change these hospital policies targeting families in low-income communities ending the use of liens and forced sales of houses for unpaid medical bills for our low-income residents.

4. In order of priority, what are three specific policy or funding initiatives related to affordable housing that you will support if (re-)elected?

1. Work to move along our in-process projects for affordable housing at 2200 Homestead, Jay Street and Trinity Park so we can create over 200 units of housing as quickly as possible.
2. Explore a new collaboration with UNC, building on our Northside and UNC Hospital collaborations to create new sliding-scaled affordable housing targeted at UNC staff and young faculty, with a priority on UNC's lowest-paid staff.

3. Leverage the enormous profits being made and huge current local development pressures to create more affordable housing units in private projects.

5. How would you create affordable housing for individuals 30% AMI and below?

Before we do anything else we need to immediately start redevelopment of town-owned Trinity Court. This is right next to downtown and a great park, has been vacant for years, and can serve residents in this income level with 40-50 units of housing.

6. Our community has seen growing polarization on arguments for increased housing density weighed against environmental impacts. What is your position on this discussion?

I believe the current enormous pressures for huge development projects are causing us to sacrifice the most beautiful parts of Chapel Hill – our public woods, creeks, streams and parks. In addition, our largest protected forested parks and open spaces are largely located in or near our higher income neighborhoods. I believe we need to reframe this discussion. Green space and forests have beneficial effects for everyone regardless of income and we should realize this even more after this awful pandemic where being outside was so important. In addition, climate change means increases in our stormwater problems and flooding events – again which have disproportionate effects in our lower income neighborhoods. Preserving our forests and trees can help us deal with these changes in the years ahead. If we just build for the sake of building pretty soon we will have a place where no one, regardless of income, wants to live.

7. How would you implement systemic solutions to inequitable property taxes in our community?

I have never run for elective office and my career has been in expanding health care access. I realize this is an important issue and I look forward to learning about this another other important issues from others on the Council and in our community who understand this issue better than I do. My years of working on health care social justice issues have benefited millions of lower income Americans who now have the financial security of knowing if they get sick or injured, they can go to the hospital without worrying about going bankrupt. I recognize that many inequities built into our tax system can have an equally devastating effects on our lower income families and we must work to change this.

8. How do you view affordable housing as a racial equity issue?

Like our state's failure to expand Medicaid, lack of affordable housing disproportionately affects our residents based on race. Decades of decisions on housing financing have meant less opportunity for Black North Carolinians to buy housing and build wealth while subsidizing home purchasing for white residents. In addition, where we build housing in is often differentiated by race. In Chapel Hill, our largest protected forests and parks are mostly surrounded by higher income neighborhoods. As climate change drives hotter temperatures, proximity to trees and woodlands is increasingly important and everyone, regardless of where they live, their race, or their ethnicity should have access to these resources. Finally, historically Black neighborhoods like Northside and Pine Knolls face problems where homes purchased by investors are turned into multiple unit student rentals, making remaining homes even less affordable. Working for change starts with remembering how we got where we are in the first place.

Please answer the following questions with Yes or No

9. Will you support a new bond for affordable housing within the next two years?
 Yes or No

10. Are you willing to dedicate at least 15% of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds toward affordable housing?
 Yes or No

11. Do you support building affordable housing for people 30% AMI or below on the Greene Tract? (Town of Chapel Hill and Carrboro candidates only).
 Yes or No

12. Do you support building affordable housing for people 30% AMI or below on the former American Legion Property? (Town of Chapel Hill candidates only).
 Yes or No