



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.)?

The housing situation in Carrboro mirrors our nationwide housing crisis—the costs for both home ownership and rentals are skyrocketing, our stock of available units is too low, and at present our town does not have a systematic plan for putting affordable housing at the center of our economic and planning goals. A major factor driving these circumstances is the primacy of single-family zoning in our town planning and economic profile. It's exceedingly difficult under our present zoning to add the units needed in high-density, transit- and service-connected parts of town, while Carrboro's reliance on property tax as one of our sole funding sources means that property owners are both disproportionately represented in planning discussions and carrying an unsustainable portion of our local economy. As taxes raise for lower income homeowners, it becomes harder for those homeowners to afford to hold onto

what is often one of their only assets, driving sales to wealthier owners and consolidating our community's lack of economic and racial diversity. At the same time, our sprawl-based, single family development prevents less wealthy would-be owners from buying units in the "missing middle" that would both provide more affordable opportunities to build equity and contribute to our tax base, which in turn accelerates the necessity for tax raises on existing homeowners. And while land is expensive and somewhat limited here, the Carrboro Comprehensive Plan has identified ample opportunities on public land like the Greene Tract and private development opportunities in high-density transit corridors that could feature meaningfully affordable housing. With a systematic plan to put affordable housing at the center of our development and economic goals— a plan that includes zoning for greater density and accessibility, diversifying our housing stock, and creating a more robust local tax base—we can remove some of the major obstacles preventing us from adding the affordable housing so badly needed in Carrboro.

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

First of all, I think local leaders need to share the commitment to affordable housing as one of our very highest priorities—leaders need to understand that housing is a human right, and fight to protect that right while ensuring the safety and dignity of all our residents. Secondly, local leaders need to be committed to consistent organizing work to absorb and elevate the perspectives of people most affected by our housing crisis. As an elected official, I intend to continue my widespread canvassing efforts to connect with residents not often represented or contacted in housing discussions, and to continue to follow the lead of community partners who are connected with neighbors who are living our lack of affordable housing day to day.

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

As a first-time candidate, I don't have a tremendous amount of experience creating and promoting affordable housing in an official capacity. As a community member, I have spoken up at local meetings in favor of projects like Weavers Grove and the upcoming Jay Street development, and I work hard to find new opportunities to lend my voice in support of further affordable housing.

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) Establishing 30-60% AMI as our standard baseline of affordability—projects that seek to offer affordable units need to meet this threshold with the majority of offered units, and any vouchers or offsets from developers need to contribute to projects that serve this income threshold.
 - 2) Increased zoning density—more areas of town need to be re-zoned to provide needed units and add more affordable opportunities for ownership
 - 3) Transit connection and business development—all affordable housing needs to be built with a proactive plan to allow residents access to expanded transit service and retail opportunities close to home in their walk radius. In order for affordable housing to thrive in a community, it must be integrated into our climate plans, allowing residents to decrease their car dependence and the amount they spend on transit, and connected to businesses like local groceries and retail businesses that increase livability and stimulate economic growth and community vitality.
5. How would you create affordable housing for individuals 30% AMI and below?

I would pursue a blended approach to make this housing a priority—increased funding for the Affordable Housing Special Action Fund and establishing town guidelines that market-rate development must either incorporate or subsidize units at 30%. Through the Special Action Fund, I'd use increased town resources to fund community partners who are both building and maintaining this 30% stock, as these partners have both the community relationships and institutional know-how to make sure this housing stock is delivered where it is most needed in our community.

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

As my previous answers indicate, I believe increased, sustainable density is necessary to achieve both our affordable housing and our climate justice goals. However, as we build and develop, we must use an equity lens to make sure that communities of color and working-class people do not bear the ecological or economic brunt of development, as has too often happened in areas like the Northside and Rogers Rd. I believe the key here is to make aggressive use of our existing town footprint to minimize further environmental effects, and to do aggressive outreach and organizing with communities where development occurs to make sure the people already present in those places benefit most from new opportunities to build equity.

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

As previously indicated, I think our town needs to be more proactive to expand our tax base and reduce the burden currently carried by homeowners, many of whom do not have an income that allows them to keep up with rising tax values. However, while this is a step toward long-term economic health and relief for owners, it would not address the urgent situation many residents currently face in existing homes. I think Chapel Hill, Carrboro, and Orange County need to come together on a municipal tax relief task force, figuring out what resources we can pool to reduce the burden for residents who have been in their homes for a long time or whose income does not allow them to meet their tax obligations. The present ad-hoc system of assessment and appeal, which places a disproportionate burden on individuals to receive the support they need with crippling tax bills, does not offer us a long-term way of dealing with this issue. We need a new way to identify and support homeowners who are at risk of committing a disproportionate amount of their resources to tax bills or face displacement, and it's going to take cooperation between all of the governments involved in our property tax base.

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

Affordable housing—or the lack thereof—is one of the issues that most vividly illustrates the racial equity gaps in our society, and providing affordable housing for all citizens is a major step toward building the racial solidarity we need to tackle systemic problems and achieve our town goals. The barriers people of color face in securing affordable, safe, homes where they can build equity and community mirror the barriers in our white-supremacist society at large—ownership opportunities require capital that we know is disproportionately concentrated among affluent whites, and our rental market is increasingly out of reach for workers in healthcare, education, service, and retail jobs that support the multiracial working class. And while the problems in housing reflect larger social problems, they are in many ways more fundamental—not only is home ownership one of the only paths to meaningful savings in our country, but housing precarity affects health outcomes, educational outcomes for students, and a slew of other important metrics for quality of life.

I believe that in order to build the coalitions we need to tackle the massive problems our society faces—this housing crisis, climate change, wealth inequality—we must be proactive to restore the equity that people of color have been systematically closed out of for far too long.

This will take a comprehensive commitment from every level of government and all of our shared institutions, and progressive communities like Carrboro need to take the lead in this work to live up to their values.

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