



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).

JENN WEAVER, HILLSBOROUGH MAYOR (unopposed)

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 overarching obstacle to housing affordability is that we exist in an economy where housing is viewed first as a commodity, rather than centered as a human right. Within that framework, we live in a community that is very desirable due to its proximity to major job centers and many amenities. Land is expensive which drives up the cost of construction considerably. Hillsborough has done a decent (but not perfect) job of adding housing in recent years, including apartments and townhomes, but that alone has not been enough to curb the steeply rising cost of housing. Many folks who struggle with affordable housing also struggle with reliable transportation. Ideally there would be more accessible and frequent connections

between Hillsborough and major job centers in Durham and Chapel Hill on public transportation. A reverse route of the Hillsborough Circulator bus would also help, as would safe bike/ped facilities expanded ubiquitously throughout town.

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

In a state like NC, where local governments have few tools available to address affordable housing, I don't know that there is one single most important role. Elected officials should: advocate for a mix of housing types including multifamily housing (especially here in Orange County municipalities where land is so expensive), should advocate for transportation planning that reduces need for car ownership to access jobs, grocery stores, etc, should partner with affordable housing non profits whenever possible to build additional affordable units. (This list is indicative of needing housing that is Affordable under federal definitions to qualify for subsidies, and "affordable" in terms of missing middle housing that is also needed so that more families and individuals of all income levels can afford to live in this community). Local governments should do everything possible to chip away at the margins while also advocating for structural change at the state/federal level.

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

I have supported with my vote as a town board commissioner (the mayor does not have a vote in Hillsborough) to support partnerships with nonprofits (Habitat for Humanity on multiple occasions, CASA with the Collins Ridge neighborhood) any time there has been an opportunity to build AH in Hillsborough. I have also supported specific decisions and advocated as general policy for multifamily housing and seeking other ways to fill the "missing middle" need for housing. One example of bringing these together is the Collins Ridge approval process. We made sure the neighborhood would have apartments and townhomes, and the 88 units to be build by CASA was another condition, as well as installing a bike/ped path around the neighborhood for both recreation and transportation purposes. As mayor, I have continued advocating for compact, walkable neighborhoods and better transportation funding and planning as essential for AH. During the pandemic while mayor I supported Hillsborough designating the entirety of our Covid relief funds (\$160,000) to direct support for housing, food, and utilities, and supported the successful application of a \$600,000 HOME grant for emergency rent relief (administered by the County to Hillsborough 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?

- The town owns 22 acres of land around the future train station property in Hillsborough. I think it is imperative that any development around the train station be transit oriented affordable multifamily housing.
- We will learn a lot from the partnership with Orange County to administer our \$600,000 emergency housing relief grant (this is a very significant amount of money for a town our size. We would have to raise property taxes 6 cents on every \$100 in valuation to raise that much). If it goes well according to all parties, I would be in favor of creating a permanent funding stream through a line item in the general fund, possibly with a ¼ or ½ cent raise in property taxes. That would be modest, but impactful and a good faith effort.
- Be more intentional and strategic about reaching out to non profit partners to create opportunities for creating more affordable housing.

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

- I see the most likely path for this being working in partnership with others – other organizations, the County, the Partnership to End Homelessness, or all of the above. Because Hillsborough has limited institutional capacity and a small tax base (less than half the population of Carrboro), we must work with other entities to make affordable housing happen in our community. Possible example: Hillsborough provides land, water/sewer connection at the 22 acre site, other entities provide units, funding and administration.

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 think this is a false choice. More compact (dense) housing communities mean less sprawl and more habitat available for thriving ecosystems. It means more people can walk, bike, take transit, or at minimum, have shorter car trips to get where they need to go, contributing to better air quality. Even within more dense planning and design, we can incorporate green spaces and shade.

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

I do not have the expertise to answer this question with real knowledge or confidence. Though Hillsborough does not have the same dynamic playing out with university housing that exists in some of the neighborhoods in Carrboro and Chapel Hill, I will still be interested to see how the tax assessors office with the county handles the re-examination they are doing in Northside and other areas. I think we could possibly learn some creative solutions in assessment that could be applicable to our historically Black neighborhoods in and proximate to Hillsborough that are under intense gentrification pressure. This pressure is also on many of our older residents of all races who have lived in Hillsborough for a long time, some multigenerational, who want to stay in their homes but find it increasingly difficult due to taxes (and water/sewer rates).

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

If racial equity is when race is not a factor in peoples' ability to thrive and live full, healthy lives (and housing is surely an essential element of this) then we would not see disparities along racial lines for the populations most affected by the affordable housing crisis. That is not the case here in Orange County. Non white populations are disproportionately more likely to be experiencing homelessness, be spending more than a third of their income on housing, need housing assistance, be impacted by gentrification, and more.

Please answer the following questions with Yes or No

**With apologies, I cannot answer these questions yes or no. For question number 9, I am unsure if this means a county bond or a municipal bond. I would almost certainly support a county bond, as the county has existing capacity (a housing department) and a tax base that could support a big enough bond to make an impact. I could not responsibly support a municipal bond for Hillsborough without knowing a lot more about the impact it would have on our residents who are already heavily burdened by county and municipal taxes plus high water and sewer rates. With a tax base as small as ours, we have to be very careful about the "bang for the buck" of any increase in taxes, whether to support a bond or any other purpose. Because we cannot differentiate property taxes, we always run the risk of our best intent just making it too expensive for the very people we want to help.

For question number 10, Hillsborough is almost certainly going to leverage the vast majority, if not all, of our \$2.28 million in ARPA funding toward the tens of millions of dollars in wastewater system upgrades and repairs that have recently been identified. In addition to providing water/wastewater being one of our primary directives as a local government, our low-income residents are heavily burdened by our high water and sewer rates. Every dollar of outside funding we can use to address these system needs mean less need for our water and sewer customers to bear the cost via rate increases. There is a *possibility* that this could change depending on when and if the federal infrastructure and reconciliation bills come through, but we are not in a position to gamble with our responsibility to provide clean water and handle wastewater without sanitary overflows locally or sending dirty water downstream.

I would be more than happy to discuss these issues in greater detail with the OCAHC as part of the elections process or any time thereafter.

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