



## 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](mailto:george@jacksoncenter.info)) or Jackie Jenks ([jjenks@ifcmailbox.org](mailto:jjenks@ifcmailbox.org)).

**Please submit your completed questionnaire via email to [ochousingcoalition@gmail.com](mailto: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.)?**

Chapel Hill faces many affordability challenges, including:

- Our rural buffer limits our size and increases the cost of land
- Much of Chapel Hill is developed and remaining parcels are challenging and, therefore, expensive to develop (topography, steep slopes, creeks and streams etc.)
- Our overall property taxes (town + county + schools) are among the highest in the state in part because we need more commercial tax base
- Growth pressures in the Triangle region are pushing housing prices up
- People are willing to pay higher prices to live here to be closer to the University or to have their children attend CHCCS
- Our development process is long and expensive, which adds to the cost

Recently, the town and university commissioned a joint housing study to take a comprehensive look at

housing in Chapel Hill and, in the coming year, the Town Council will be coming up with a plan for how to achieve our housing and community goals.

While we cannot mitigate all of the challenges listed above, there are things we can do such as continuing our efforts to diversify our tax base so that less burden falls on residents and finding ways to create middle income, missing middle and gentle density housing options so that more people who work here can afford to live in Chapel Hill.

We have extremely expensive stock, older stock and expensive rents. Re-development and gentrification are adding to pushing out the older less expensive homes to create newer more expensive homes

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

One of our town's most important goals is to be a "place for everyone" which, for me, means being diverse, inclusive, and welcoming. It's not just about community building; it is a matter of fairness that people who do important but low-wage work be able to live here; that people who can't work or wish to stay in Chapel Hill as they get older can find a place in our community too. It's also about making sure that, as life circumstances change, people have affordable opportunities to stay in the community.

Elected officials/Local government play a pivotal role in making sure all community members can afford housing by creating and implementing policies, strategies and programs aimed at creating and maintaining a broad range of housing options and types within the community.

With the help of the new housing study, we will be working on land use strategies to address housing gaps such as missing middle and middle income housing for young professionals, families and seniors.

Other ways in which the Town currently supports our community – and their ability to continue living here – are by creating more good-paying jobs in town, paying a living wage, and providing housing benefits to our employees. A next step is for us to encourage our larger employers to help create housing opportunities for their own employees to live here.

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

Over the past 12 years, I have been working to address the need for affordable housing in our

community as a member of the boards of Orange Habitat and the Community Home Trust and, for the past six years, as Mayor of Chapel Hill.

In addition, I have helped build Habitat houses here and in Honduras.

Since taking office, I have worked hard to make sure that Chapel Hill continues to make significant investments in affordable housing, spending \$6 million annually as well as dispersing the \$10 million from our 2018 affordable housing bonds.

Specific efforts that I have led and supported include:

- Creation of an Affordable Housing Strategy and an Affordable Housing Master Plan with affordable housing development and preservation targets.
- Creation of the Town Property Task Force to identify opportunities for creating affordable housing on public lands as a way of reducing project costs and increasing the number of units created.
- Passage of a \$10 million affordable housing bond in 2018 and approval, in 2020, of \$5.25 million in funding to support the development of 278 new affordable homes.
- Creation of an affordable housing dashboard tool to help us track progress toward our affordable housing goals.
- Negotiation for on-site rental and ownership affordable housing opportunities within new residential and mixed use communities instead of payments-in-lieu.
- Review of foreclosures and abandoned properties by our Housing & Community department to identify new opportunities for preserving affordable housing in Chapel Hill.

This year, the Town Council approved the 2200 Homestead Road project – a first of its kind project involving multiple housing partners using town-owned land which will include a mix of housing types and community amenities.

We also partnered with CASA and the Town of Carrboro for Perry Place, a project that includes units dedicated to individuals with disabilities.

And, we have plans for redeveloping our public housing communities and will be adding more units at Trinity Court and Craig Gomains. In this way, we will be able to increase the number of units supporting individuals earning 30% AMI and below.

**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) Continue to use our penny for affordable housing to give grants to our partners and go out for another affordable housing bond when we have the debt capacity to do so.
- 2) Continue to advocate for housing that meets the needs of individual earning 60% and under when approving development projects.

- 3) Create strategies and options for individuals living in mobile housing neighborhoods so that they can remain in our community – either by staying in their existing neighborhood or transitioning to places that meet their needs and those of their family.

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

Providing housing for individuals earning 30% AMI poses the greatest challenge. Currently, we meet this need through the Town’s public housing communities but the wait list is very long.

There will be some new units coming on-line in projects at 2200 Homestead Road and CASA’s Perry Place.

Strategies that I will continue to spearhead and support to meet this need in our community include:

- Continuing funding for management, operations and maintenance of the Town’s 13 Public Housing communities which offer the greatest level of affordability and stability through adjustable, income-based rent.
- Funding expansion of existing public housing communities where possible, beginning with Trinity Court and Craig Gomains.
- Contributing town-owned land and waiving development fees where possible to enable creation of more 30%AMI units

Additionally, I will continue to support funding for services and programs that help make Chapel Hill “affordable” to our lowest income individuals such as our fare-free Chapel Hill Transit bus system and EZ-Rider Shuttle service, Emergency Housing Assistance program and grants to our not-for-profit community partners.

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

We can have both – affordable housing and (green space/a healthy environment) - and we need to have both!

Over 30 years ago, Chapel Hill, Carrboro and Orange County set us on a path toward environmentally-responsible development by creating the rural buffer and the urban services boundary as a way to prevent sprawl.

As a result, we need to build more densely in town and buildings need to go up to allow us to retain more green and to reduce impervious surface.

This year, after three years of work, the Town completed Phase 1 of a Land Use Management Ordinance (LUMO) rewrite by adopting an updated Future Land Use Map (FLUM) which focuses on our transit corridors as the place for denser growth so that people will use multimodal ways of getting to work and other places instead of relying on cars.

As we know, affordability is a factor of people's housing and transportation costs so the ability for lower income individuals and families to live in areas where they can walk, bike or take transit to work or run errands will make a huge difference.

At the same time, we know that a healthy environment – clean air, clean water, quality green space and a healthy tree canopy – are important for everyone's physical health and mental well-being as well as for the health of the planet. So, these are factors that we need to consider as well.

The Town currently has several efforts underway which will allow us to better address the challenges of adding more housing while also protecting the environment, maintaining a high quality of life for everyone, and creating climate resilience. This includes the joint housing study along with efforts through our Climate Action plan, beginning to identify needs in our low wealth community and to update land use policies and ordinances.

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

The Town needs to work with the Orange County Tax Collector's office to have a system of affordable housing adjustments to the value of the homes so that they are not caught in the market increases. Chapel Hill already has a standard Board of Adjustment review for Community Home Trust and Habitat Homes. Now, we need one for other homes that fall into this category.

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

We know that, historically, minority families were not given the same opportunities to invest in housing equity and therefore have not built up as much family wealth over the generations. We need to help people have affordable, decent housing with opportunities for home ownership. This is a community priority.

**Please answer the following questions with Yes or No**

**8. Will you support a new bond for affordable housing within the next two years?**

Yes or No

I do support another affordable housing bond but we will not have the debt capacity to handle that and the new MSC building -

**9. 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

We have committed to having a full public process for the ARPA monies and I want to make sure we hear from everyone, including affordable housing partners. Affordable Housing is a top priority for the Town but, at this point, I am not able to promise how much we will be designating until we know other needs as well.

**10. 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

**11. 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