

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 2

Candidate:

Raevan Howard

1. What do you see as the top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa? How should those issues be addressed?

The top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa are: Crime, blight, and affordable housing. I feel the city council should look at the root problem of crime and not just treat the symptoms. Code enforcement currently does their due diligence trying to tackle blight throughout the city but I feel that some areas should be given more attention and possible financial assistance through grants and federal funding to help home owners repair their homes. Affordable housing is more needed in some areas of Tuscaloosa than others. Therefore, I believe that representatives that have a need for workforce housing should form partnerships that will encourage public and private partnerships so that affordable housing will become possible in needed communities.

2. Downtown Tuscaloosa has experienced significant growth in recent years, adding hotels, residences, restaurants, and retail. In your view, what needs to be done to build on that momentum?

Downtown Tuscaloosa has grown by leaps and bounds in the recent years! However, I believe the city can provide incentives that will help the businesses operate on a scale where they can provide more experiences for the consumer that will visit the downtown area.

3. There is significant community interest in recruiting knowledge-based industries to Tuscaloosa to provide local employment opportunities for the best and brightest graduates of our institutions of higher education. What is your view of how this goal can be achieved?

I believe the best way to retain graduates from institutions of higher education is to encourage industries to build their businesses in our city, but also make sure that we have a housing market that is appealing and affordable to young professionals. I also believe that investing in the Tuscaloosa City School System has to continue to be a priority for all leaders of our community and we must continue to assist the Tuscaloosa City Schools with funding that will help continue the dual enrollment program, which give students an early start to their college careers.

4. There is public discussion about a large sports/recreation complex being developed on the former McFarland Mall site. What is your view on this proposed development and should public funds be used to invest in the project?

I believe that the McFarland Mall location is a great location for businesses. However, I believe that the property needs to be carefully vetted to determine what types of business will truly prosper at that location. It is my position that city funds should not be used for private ventures.

5. What is your vision for parks and recreation in Tuscaloosa and what role should the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority (PARA) play?

My vision for parks and recreation throughout the city of Tuscaloosa, is a vision where every neighborhood and community has easy access to sports and recreation facilities and updated parks that

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 2

encourage healthy communities. I believe that PARA has the blue blueprint on how to provide this vision across the city of Tuscaloosa and that community leaders should continue to encourage them to provide this service city wide.

6. What is your position on Elevate Tuscaloosa? Do you believe Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should remain separated from general funds and used for the types of projects initially discussed, subject to customary review, need, and design requirements?

I supported Elevate Tuscaloosa because I saw the potential to elevate “all” of Tuscaloosa by increasing the sells tax. Once Elevate was introduced, I quickly advocated for needed amenities to be added to the budget, such as upgrades to parks and recreation and line items to be created to upgrade needed infrastructure. I believe that it is necessary to keep Elevate funds separate from general funds.

7. Do you support efforts and city funding to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa? Why or why not?

In the past I have supported all of the needed airport upgrades and I believe that the Tuscaloosa Airport is essential to the growth and economic growth of our community.

8. The city has multiple budgets, the five largest being the General Fund Operating, General Fund Reserve, Water/Sewer Operating, Water/Sewer Reserve, and Elevate Tuscaloosa. How should each of these be utilized and managed?

First off, each budget should be utilized in the manner that it was created. Secondly, the city should maintain transparency for each line item that is created in each individual budget.

9. What are the areas of city operations that you think you can bring any special knowledge or expertise? Why are those areas important to you?

As a native of West Tuscaloosa and being one of the youngest members currently serving on the Tuscaloosa City Council, I believe I bring special knowledge to ways to reach our youth, especially those in that are involved in crimes that are often reported in West Tuscaloosa. I also feel that I bring special knowledge to the needs of my community that need to be met in order to make my community stronger such as: youth sports, housing, and blight. My professional career as a social worker, provides me with the necessary skills to identify problems that are not easily observed by others which often are miss characterized when it comes to criminal activity.

10. What is your vision for the City of Tuscaloosa in 10 years? How will you, in your role as an elected official, help make that vision a reality?

In 10 years I would like to see Tuscaloosa as ‘ONE’ Tuscaloosa. I would like for job opportunities, and housing options to be uniform across the city. I would also like to see a decrease in blight and crime in every district. I will continue to work towards this vision by building diverse partnerships through the City School System, local business owners, and other organizations and entities throughout the city.

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

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Candidate:

Boris Hurst

1. What do you see as the top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa? How should those issues be addressed?

A. Jobs – Organizing more job fairs to reach out to the youth in all areas of the City of Tuscaloosa. Focusing on interview preparation, resume writing and etiquette.

B. Healthcare (Covid 19) – Stressing the importance of wearing mask, social distancing and getting vaccinated.

C. Revitalization – Encouraging large businesses to continue to invest in the communities. Sponsor annual street festivals to bring in more revenue for all areas of the city.

2. Downtown Tuscaloosa has experienced significant growth in recent years, adding hotels, residences, restaurants, and retail. In your view, what needs to be done to build on that momentum?

We need significant growth in the western part of the city of restaurant chains and retail chains. Adding more parking for downtown to support business, hotel overflow and nightlife.

3. There is significant community interest in recruiting knowledge-based industries to Tuscaloosa to provide local employment opportunities for the best and brightest graduates of our institutions of higher education. What is your view of how this goal can be achieved?

Establish partnerships with our local college and university to attract knowledge-based businesses to Tuscaloosa.

4. There is public discussion about a large sports/recreation complex being developed on the former McFarland Mall site. What is your view on this proposed development and should public funds be used to invest in the project?

I believe the some of the funding should go to this project and other funds should be spread among the other districts to upgrade or build existing projects.

5. What is your vision for parks and recreation in Tuscaloosa and what role should the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority (PARA) play?

I believe more activities are needed such after school and weekend events. There are too many kids with a lack of activities for them to do.

6. What is your position on Elevate Tuscaloosa? Do you believe Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should remain separated from general funds and used for the types of projects initially discussed, subject to customary review, need, and design requirements?

I believe Elevate can be enhanced to include other projects that will have a direct impact on the most deprive districts in the city.

7. Do you support efforts and city funding to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa? Why or why not?

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 2

I believe more research is needed in this area.

8. The city has multiple budgets, the five largest being the General Fund Operating, General Fund Reserve, Water/Sewer Operating, Water/Sewer Reserve, and Elevate Tuscaloosa. How should each of these be utilized and managed?

All budgets should be used based on what they were allocated for.

9. What are the areas of city operations that you think you can bring any special knowledge or expertise? Why are those areas important to you?

A. Jobs

B. Healthcare

C. Project Planning – More sidewalks for all K-12 schools. This would provide a safer

10. What is your vision for the City of Tuscaloosa in 10 years? How will you, in your role as an elected official, help make that vision a reality?

A. Low Unemployment – Be an advocate for night school & vocational training for the youth and low income communities. Work with other officials to develop programs to build technical skills sets.

B. Better Healthcare for All – Advocate & promote healthcare screening for the city of Tuscaloosa.

C. More Diversity in key positions of city government

Candidate:

Paul Sanders

1. What do you see as the top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa? How should those issues be addressed?

The three top issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa at this present time are controlling the spread of the COVID virus, reducing crime in our neighborhoods and affordable housing.

- Controlling COVID is paramount! The city should continue to enforce the mask mandate, extend mandates to limit the number of people in businesses at one time, and seek to provide the vaccination of one of the vaccines that are now available.
- Reducing crime in our communities will take increasing street lighting, promoting community watch program for the various areas in our city.
- Affordable Housing is another paramount issue. The City of Tuscaloosa has become one of the more notable cities across the nation. We have received national attention because of our colleges, the various manufacturing organizations, and the other amenities our city offers. It is time (we are overdue) that we address the issues of homelessness, and people living in sub-standard housing conditions.

2. Downtown Tuscaloosa has experienced significant growth in recent years, adding hotels, residences, restaurants, and retail. In your view, what needs to be done to build on that momentum?

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 2

To continue with the Tuscaloosa growth momentum, we must use the same tax incentives that were used to have the commercial growth in downtown Tuscaloosa to develop West Tuscaloosa (specially, Districts 1 & 2). Additionally, we must use the same tax incentives to re-invent McFarland Blvd. Over the years, businesses have closed, leaving empty building and blighted areas along McFarland Blvd.

3. There is significant community interest in recruiting knowledge-based industries to Tuscaloosa to provide local employment opportunities for the best and brightest graduates of our institutions of higher education. What is your view of how this goal can be achieved?

In order to recruit knowledge-base industries to Tuscaloosa and provide local employment for best and brightest graduates we must develop and establish quality high speed internet service throughout the city. We must partner with our local colleges and universities developing a marketing team for research and development. This would involve all three of the UA campuses, using UAH to provide the research for space and engineering. UAB to provide medical research, and the main UA campus, partnered with Stillman College and Shelton State Community College for educational research.

4. There is public discussion about a large sports/recreation complex being developed on the former McFarland Mall site. What is your view on this proposed development, and should public funds be used to invest in the project?

A large sports/recreation complex on the old McFarland Mall site is a great idea! It's easy access to the 20/59 interstate, hotels and area shopping makes this location ideal for a project like this. This will also encourage and allow for more tourist to come into Tuscaloosa.

5. What is your vision for parks and recreation in Tuscaloosa and what role should the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority (PARA) play?

My vision for PARA. PARA is vitality important for R&R (rest and relaxation). Serious consideration should be and must be given to upgrades to local parks. The City of Tuscaloosa should provide funding to PARA to operate all complexes, so that a variety of outdoor activities can be accomplished without duplication of service.

PARA has recently been recognized by the state as having the best program in the State of Alabama. PARA should be provided additional funding so that they can conduct some long-range planning, and enhance and expand programs for the youth and seniors in our city.

6. What is your position on Elevate Tuscaloosa? Do you believe Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should remain separated from general funds and used for the types of projects initially discussed, subject to customary review, need, and design requirements?

I believe Elevate Tuscaloosa is a great idea, with a project \$21,000,000.00 annual income; however, this funding source is regressive. There are Tuscaloosa citizens that cannot afford paying more sales tax. But since this is already in effect, this tax revenue should be a part of the General Fund Budget to be used to meet any shortcomings in the budget. I will have additional discussions at a later date.

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 2

7. Do you support efforts and city funding to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa? Why or why not?

No. Tuscaloosa is only 45 minutes from the Birmingham Airport, and about 45 minutes from the Airport in Columbus. I would be in favor of developing a bus shuttle system with multiple trips to Birmingham and back to Tuscaloosa, or even a high-speed rail system, linking Tuscaloosa to Birmingham. I will have additional discussions at a later date.

8. The city has multiple budgets, the five largest being the General Fund Operating, General Fund Reserve, Water/Sewer Operating, Water/Sewer Reserve, and Elevate Tuscaloosa. How should each of these be utilized and managed?

I would suggest having only one budget – un-earmarking funds.

9. What are the areas of city operations that you think you can bring any special knowledge or expertise? Why are those areas important to you?

I can be instrumental in Community Planning and Workforce Development. This city has a population of above 100,00 people, and we need to give more attention to the following very important issues:

- Affordable Housing
- Housing for the homeless
- Mental Health Advocates

10. What is your vision for the City of Tuscaloosa in 10 years? How will you, in your role as an elected official, help make that vision a reality?

The City of Tuscaloosa is a great place to live, and to raise children. We can move from being a great city to a more excellent city if we work on and improve on the following:

- Provide a quality Public Educational System (improve on what we already have)
- Continue recruiting and add more good paying jobs with benefits
- Affordable Housing for the residents
- Develop and improve the city's infrastructure of the city, good and quality roads (at least one more road with six lanes - three lanes to travel east and three lanes to travel west)
- Improve and add to the existing public transportation. Link public transportation to neighboring cities (i.e. Northport and Moundville)

Candidate:

Norma Young

1. What do you see as the top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa? How should those issues be addressed?

The three top issues facing Tuscaloosa are public safety, economic development, better education and affordable housing.

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 2

2. Downtown Tuscaloosa has experienced significant growth in recent years, adding hotels, residences, restaurants, and retail. In your view, what needs to be done to build on that momentum?

Job creation is what's needed for underserved communities to enjoy this significant growth.

3. There is significant community interest in recruiting knowledge-based industries to Tuscaloosa to provide local employment opportunities for the best and brightest graduates of our institutions of higher education. What is your view of how this goal can be achieved?

More computer training and investment in personnel.

4. There is public discussion about a large sports/recreation complex being developed on the former McFarland Mall site. What is your view on this proposed development and should public funds be used to invest in the project?

I am not in favor of this project at the moment. I have to study the proposal more.

5. What is your vision for parks and recreation in Tuscaloosa and what role should the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority (PARA) play?

I am in favor of upgrades to the parks and recreation centers according to need. PARA should be in charge of this vision.

7. Do you support efforts and city funding to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa? Why or why not?

I agree with having commercial air service in Tuscaloosa.

8. The city has multiple budgets, the five largest being the General Fund Operating, General Fund Reserve, Water/Sewer Operating, Water/Sewer Reserve, and Elevate Tuscaloosa. How should each of these be utilized and managed?

Since I am not aware of how these budgets are managed now I can't say. The Finance committee approves many financial issues.

9. What are the areas of city operations that you think you can bring any special knowledge or expertise? Why are those areas important to you?

City projects would be my choice. I am interested in economic development.

10. What is your vision for the City of Tuscaloosa in 10 years? How will you, in your role as an elected official, help make that vision a reality?

My vision for Tuscaloosa is to have a more educated populace, good jobs, safe neighborhoods, and equitable housing.