

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 3

Candidate:

Norman Crow

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 I see facing the City of Tuscaloosa are the COVID-19 response and recovery, public safety and economic development. Our COVID-19 response must strike the right balance between health and safety with the opening of more businesses. This will continue our economic recovery. We must address our public safety issue by making sure our first responders are properly funded and have the resources, training and equipment they need to do their job. We need to continue to encourage economic development across the whole city. That includes making sure that all our citizens have access to the skills training they need to improve their life.

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 become a bright spot for our city. Post COVID-19, we need to continue to encourage tourism and pro-growth policies. A community is only as vibrant as its downtown. We need to continue that momentum and spread it to all parts of the city.

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?

We need to continue to focus on livability. This is a community with a good quality of life. We need to leverage the intellectual capital from our higher education institutions to keep them here with job opportunities that knowledge-based industries would bring. As a past Chairman of the Chamber, Tuscaloosa City Board of Education member, and current leader of the Tuscaloosa Industrial Development Authority, I have played a role on this issue and will continue to do that if elected to the council.

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

Any proposed development such as this should be evaluated by the council by asking three questions. 1. What incentive does the city have to provide for this project? 2. What are the number of jobs being created? 3. Is this project a good investment for the taxpayers of Tuscaloosa? These are the questions I will ask on any economic development project that comes before the City Council, regardless of district, if I am elected.

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

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Parks and recreation are crucial to our city's future and quality of life. PARA has a part to play in this and must have a better relationship with 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?

Elevate Tuscaloosa has been approved so we must make sure that those priorities are funded. We must use the taxpayer's money to fund these projects as presented to the public. We should keep the Elevate funds separate from the general funds.

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

Yes. Commercial Air Service is critical to the long-term growth of our community. This will keep us competitive with other communities for economic development projects.

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?

As a City Council member, I would review these budgets with the finance department to make sure I understand where our money is being spent. The council needs to understand how these budgets reflect our priorities and must make sure that the money is being spent wisely. If elected, my background in accounting and finance as a businessman will serve me well in this capacity.

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?

If elected, I have broad and diverse experience that I would bring to the Council. I have been a small business owner. I understand that the decisions that I make effect people's lives. I have a background in education from my four years representing District 3 on the Tuscaloosa City Board of Education. Our local education system is critical to preparing our students for the jobs of the future. My economic development experience through the TCIDA, Chamber of Commerce, and State Workforce Councils have helped me to see what is necessary for a vibrant economy where all people have good jobs.

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?

Tuscaloosa is growing. We have a lot more citizens than we did ten years ago and in the next ten years we will continue to grow if we make the right decisions as a community. We need to manage this growth wisely and provide economic opportunities for every one of our citizens. Our city needs to invest in public safety, workforce development and strategically manage our infrastructure needs. Those things are keys to our future success as a city.

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Candidate:

Matt Hood

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

1. COVID-19: With the increased availability of the vaccine, there will be an opportunity to begin removing restrictions on local businesses. Many small businesses have been devastated by this pandemic. There shouldn't be unnecessary municipal restrictions on local businesses any longer than absolutely necessary.
2. Reopening/Economic Recovery: The pandemic has devastated local businesses. As a hotelier, I saw first-hand the impact of COVID-19. Tuscaloosa must capitalize on a robust recovery by investing in marketing opportunities for the city. We need people to know that Tuscaloosa is open for business.
3. Crime/Public Safety: The city must invest in our public safety workers. Addressing crime and ensuring public safety starts with an adequately staffed police and fire and rescue departments. In addition to fully funding our public safety workers, it is imperative that we address the underlying causes of crime. When people lack education and opportunity, they will often turn to crime.

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?

Tuscaloosa must be a place where people want to visit and live. This comes by improving the quality of life and offering world class amenities in the community. By doing this, you will continue to see growth community wide, but especially in the downtown core. Tuscaloosa has a vibrant night life, excellent restaurants, good entertainment venues, and many recreational opportunities. These things often build on themselves and will attract people. We must continue to build on this foundation.

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?

We have seen the exponential growth of the knowledge-based economy over the last 20 plus years, and that growth will only continue. This has to be a two-pronged approach. First, create the opportunity by developing strategic partnerships with existing industries. This will create an employment pipeline for our current base of potential employees. It is essential that the University of Alabama, Shelton State, and Stillman College serve as strategic partners in this effort. Second, we must make Tuscaloosa a place people want to stay. Part of the knowledge-based economy is the increased ability to work remotely from any location. People need to choose to make Tuscaloosa a place to call home. This requires recreational opportunities, world class public amenities, strong K-12 public education, low crime, strong neighborhoods, etc.- all quality-of-life factors.

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?

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No, public funds shouldn't be used at this location to develop a sports/recreation complex. The former McFarland Mall site is close to the intersection of two major transportation arteries in the city. This site would be prime for the development of tax revenue generating businesses (restaurants, retail, etc.) Given the number of people who drive by this site on a daily basis, it could also be used as a location for a large new retail outlet that might not currently exist in Tuscaloosa. A sports/recreation complex, while needed, shouldn't be placed at a location which could be better used for other forms of development.

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 want PARA to offer world class facilities and programming for people in Tuscaloosa. This is essential to improving the quality of life in our community. The PARA model has worked in many other communities and can work in Tuscaloosa. It is essential that a stable funding source be developed for PARA from the City of Tuscaloosa, Northport, and Tuscaloosa County. Without this consistent funding source, PARA will continue to have difficulty with long term planning. Tuscaloosa spends less per capita on recreation than most other major cities in Alabama. I would like to see this changed.

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?

While many of the programs and initiatives slated to be funded by Elevate are needed and will bring benefit to the City of Tuscaloosa, it is unfortunate that the funding mechanism is a 1% sales tax increase. A sales tax increase hits moderate to low-income families more than anyone else and is extremely regressive, even with the built-in garbage offset. Tuscaloosa needs to spend within its means. Elevate Tuscaloosa was initially presented as a comprehensive mechanism to provide resources for education, arts, entertainment, parks, and transportation. It should be used for these things and not to prop up the general fund. Projects should be selected based on empirical data about how they will impact the community and improve the quality of life. Spending from Elevate must have robust oversight from the community and council.

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

Yes. Commercial air service is vital to the growth of Tuscaloosa. There are more than 440,000 people within a 60-minute drive on the Tuscaloosa airport. The University of Alabama has 38,000 students, 57% of those students are from other states and 4% are international students. These students and their families would utilize local air service. Local industries would also utilize local air service. Mercedes-Benz alone sends thousands of employees to stay in the Birmingham area due to the proximity to the Birmingham airport. These employees then drive to the facility in Tuscaloosa. This community needs a vibrant local airport with commercial air service.

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?

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The approved budget should serve as a blueprint for city spending. The budget should be made using realistic growth forecasts and conservative revenue projections. Long term technological, economic, demographic changes must be considered. City policy requires that the General Fund, General Fund Reserve, Water & Sewer Fund, and Water & Sewer Reserve each have an unencumbered fund balance that shouldn't be designated for expenditure unless approved by the city council. Approval for using these reserve funds should only be done in the event of a dire emergency that impacts city revenues. Elevate was intended to fund projects and initiatives in the areas of education, arts, entertainment, parks, and transportation. Elevate Tuscaloosa shouldn't be used to prop up any other budget. It is the city council's responsibility to provide robust oversight of city spending.

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 have a background in hospitality and revenue management. I am convinced that you can take the very basic principles of customer service and apply them to the operations of local government. The city can and should offer the highest levels of service and accessibility to the citizens of Tuscaloosa. In addition, I work with multi-million-dollar budgets, project revenues, and I am responsible for monitoring expenses. This is essential for city government. The city council has a duty to ensure that every dollar of public funding is accounted for and used in the most responsible way possible.

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?

I truly believe that Tuscaloosa's future is bright. We have an amazing community that is filled with people who want this city to become all that it can be. I would like to see Tuscaloosa continue to grow as the economic hub for west Alabama. This can be done by recruiting knowledge-based jobs and improving the quality of life for people in the community. It is essential that every vote taken on the city council be made with this end goal in mind.

Candidate:

Bill Wright

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 from my perspective are 1) Crime 2) Infrastructure (Aging & Expansion) 3) Financial stability. Property crime has been and is a growing problem for District 3 and the City of Tuscaloosa. District 3, which has no police precinct and on average one or two patrol officers serving the area is problematic. The city council failed the city in 2013, when it rejected adopting impact fees on large student housing projects which would have generated \$15-20 million dollars for infrastructure repairs and maintenance, as recommended by the Student Rental Housing Task Force. We must readdress the implementation of impact fees on large student housing projects. The city's financial health as it relates to COVID19 impact on our primary source of revenue,

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which are sales taxes is still to be determined. After the pandemic is behind, what will have been the impact on the local retail marketplace and ultimately revenues?

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?

As a business owner and commercial property owner in downtown Tuscaloosa, starting back in 2011, I have seen firsthand the economic activity and impact occurring in our downtown core. The main driver as I have seen over the past years has been the increase in student housing downtown with several new developments and redevelopments. In order to maintain the momentum of more retail, restaurants, entertainment establishments, we must continue to see residential growth which we are starting to see with condo's being constructed south of University Blvd. and there is untapped potential west of Lurleen Wallace Blvd.

As to more residential housing in the downtown core, we should promote and foster housing that is NOT student housing, but more traditional, higher end apartments and condo's that a mature, empty nester wanting to have access to the changing downtown area. I am a perfect candidate for housing that allows me to live, work and play downtown with future growth bringing more retail and dining options, not solely student focused.

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 was born, raised and educated in the City of Tuscaloosa. After graduating from the University of Alabama, it pained me to know that I had to leave Tuscaloosa for a good, high paying corporate job, but that was the reality 30 years ago.

We have partnerships today like The Edge that has great potential of being a game changer for this community. The untapped potential I see is the opportunity that lies in East Tuscaloosa, Alberta, with direct access to campus. This area is a blank canvas and could easily be developed as a business incubator area/facilities for companies that outgrow and/or grow into full fledged business entities. The absolute best feature of this area, and many other areas across the city, is that these areas lie in designated Opportunity Zones.

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 would support the property owners efforts to develop his property for a large sports/recreation complex. Should the city invest public funds in this project? NO.

I am not supportive of the City buying or partnering with the private sector in the speculative, real estate market for any other use than public good, i.e. buying property for roads, water/sewer services, city facilities, etc.. Recently, the city purchased 24 houses in University Manor because of crime. If the city was having issues with the area and a singular property owner was derelict in his maintenance of

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those properties, we should have cited him to repair these properties. If the owner fails to make repairs, then we raze the houses and send him the bill and if its not paid, place a lien on the properties. This is a bad precedent the city is making. Why wouldn't other property owners allow their blighted, unrented properties continue to deteriorate and wait for the city to come purchase those properties?

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

Growing up in the City of Tuscaloosa, I participated throughout my life in PARA football, baseball and basketball, so I know the value and benefit of PARA programs. Since my youth, we saw more PARA facilities that were targeted to serve the aging population and citizens needing facilities at a cost that is affordable. I would like to see those two missions, youth and senior programs, continue to remain healthy and relevant in our community.

I would like to see PARA, work in conjunction with the Tuscaloosa Tourism & Sports Commission to improve and expand our facilities to have the opportunity to recruit events to our area that could have a dramatic economic impact on our city. Tuscaloosa's central location in the state makes our community a perfect spot for large events, but we must have the facilities. We have the hotels and restaurants to support large state-wide and regional events. The best part about many of these events is they usually take place in what I would describe as off-season for Tuscaloosa, occurring in late spring and summer. I have had conversation with Don Staley about events like this, it could be soccer, lacrosse, pickleball, water events....also, think convention center! It is doable.

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?

Elevate Tuscaloosa, at its inception, was and remains a noble effort for all areas of the city. When the Mayor proposed the sales tax increase to fund Elevate, it was promoted in conjunction with a grocery tax decrease, which only the state can approve. This tax negatively impacts the poorest of residents. Therefore, with this additional tax generated by Elevate, and grocery tax still in place, it should remain lock boxed in the Elevate fund and NOT allowed to be moved into the general fund. I am non-negotiable on this issue.

However, with the uncertainty of the financial impact from COVID-19 on sales tax revenues, which I mentioned previously, I feel strongly on two points. One, we must reevaluate as the finances come more into light if we can proceed with the projects on the current timetable. Some might need to be delayed indefinitely, and yes that will cause issues between districts. Second, I would propose that we prioritize the projects based on highest potential Return on Investment. My preference is to focus on the downtown core projects, like the Saban Center or possible convention center. These facilities could generate hotel and restaurant activity thereby increasing sales and hotel taxes.

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

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As a former employee of the Worlds largest airfreight carrier, I understand the importance of commercial air service, either passenger or cargo, to the economic activity it brings to a community. Tuscaloosa, Northport and West Alabama would benefit from an increase in any commercial air activity at the Tuscaloosa Regional Airport. Do I support city funding to work towards the goal of more commercial service, this answer is Absolutely, Positively!

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?

As a small business owner, who has had to manage budgets and balance sheets for the last 21 years, I use peer driven operating benchmarks to manage departments and divisions. City departments should operate and manage efficiently within their prescribed budgets and ideally it would be impactful if they could operate under budget. Would it not be unique if the city could operate like every business operates without the ability to raise revenues via taxes increase? Knowing that a business grows revenues via overall market growth through quality products and services provided to customers or citizens.

Many years ago, I embraced a corporate philosophy of People-Service-Profit, meaning hire, train, equip people to perform a job or task and they would provide and impeccable service to the customer and thus creating profits. By the way Profits are good. The P-S-P philosophy can work in city government as well and those profits that we generate will be reinvested back into the people and the P-S-P is a never-ending process. Every department will have to do their part and realize our citizens are our customers. I have seen this work and it work if I am elected!

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 would submit to you that there is not a candidate in the District 3 race or for that matter, any candidate that has had a more positive impact on the city operations than myself. Over the last nine years, I have served on the Tuscaloosa Planning and Zoning Commission the last two years as Chairman and previous two as Vice-Chairman, which is a position that is voted on by my fellow commissioners. Also, having served as Chairman of the Student Rental Housing Task Force in 2013 & 2015, 2017 District 3 Master Plan and currently on Framework Comprehensive Adoption Process.

We have a great staff in our planning department, and I would like to see the continued improvements and support they need to assist property owners and developers more easily navigate the bureaucracy that exist currently within city hall.

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?

Tuscaloosa 2031, I believe can be a safe and thriving economic powerhouse of a city right on the heels of Huntsville, Austin, TX and Chattanooga. I want Tuscaloosa to be the fastest growing and best places to

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live in Alabama, for that matter in America. We have the natural and human resources to be as great as we can be if we collectively work towards a shared goal. This can occur if we harness our collective energies and help lead city government, educational institutions, business interest, cultural assets and religious communities. This greatness is not a matter of random luck, but in reality we can get there with direct and determined focus. Also, in 2031, I will have been retired from my District 3 city council seat as I commit to serving only two terms. It will be time for another business minded leader, not a politician seeking higher office, to assume the mantel and lead us into a new decade.