

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 7

Candidate:

Cassius Lanier

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 are providing funding to help small businesses recover from the pandemic. The second issue would be to provide additional funding for the Tuscaloosa city schools in order to help students recover from missed learning opportunities. The third issue should involve the city's full participation in an information campaign to have all residents vaccinated against COVID-19. Each of these issues can only be addressed through the city's efforts to fund sources that would provide adequate funding.

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?

First, let me say that I'm truly pleased with the growth and development of our downtown area. In order to sustain this growth, we must continue to build on our entertainment and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

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 this is a move in the right direction. Our city has already invested in opportunities for high school students to begin receiving college credits while still attending high school. Our technological interest is providing not only academic choices, but includes skilled workforce training. This training prepares students to go directly into the workforce and begin earning the kind of wages that will help them provide for themselves, their families, and our community.

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 have not seen evidence that this project is anything substantive. I do not believe our tax dollars should be spent creating business interests for individual developers. Therefore, I would be against the city supporting funding for the aforementioned McFarland Mall project or any other project where private investors should fund such operations.

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

There seems to be an imbalance in what PARA provides in terms of recreation opportunities for various communities. For example, in districts that are largely African American, we find fewer recreational opportunities being provided for youth as well as adults. To make it clear, District 1, District 2, and District 7 fall behind compared to the rest of the city.

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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 tremendous asset for the City of Tuscaloosa. Elevate Tuscaloosa will provide the necessary funding to develop an experience-based economy which is the model for the future and provide several new jobs for our city. I strongly believe that Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should remain separate from general funds and only be used for the types of projects initially discussed. Funding acquired through Elevate Tuscaloosa should be subject to customary review, need, and design requirements. In a time of crisis, however, I am willing to rethink the use of funding to meet a particular need.

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

Yes, I support funding efforts to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa. This will provide the kind of convenience for business interests to visit our city without having to go to Birmingham and then have to arrange for ground transportation to get to Tuscaloosa which in my opinion is too much of a delay.

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?

Each of these budgets should be managed separately and funds should only be dispersed for the target interest of each fund.

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 believe that I can provide a great deal of information to the Tuscaloosa Builds Program. I am a business man and I know the importance of creating small business opportunities. African American women are the largest owners of minority businesses in the country. I would begin networking with other cities to determine how we could provide more growth and development for women owned African American businesses in the City of Tuscaloosa.

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 on the right path. As a city council member, I would help implement plans and strategies for our city's growth. This would require me to get more familiar with the process when I'm elected.

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Candidate:

Sonya McKinstry

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

I see the top three issues as: COVID, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND HOMELESSNESS.

Covid- try to continue to encourage everyone to follow CDC guidelines, and get vaccination as soon as possible.

Economic Development- invest more into efforts into recruiting businesses in the underdeveloped areas of the city.

Homelessness- create a vivid plan to address the homeless camps across the city. Explore affordable housing and job opportunities to help assist the rehabilitation efforts.

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?

Continue studying of what is being done especially in other college towns. I believe that we have invested in our riverfront which has and will open multiple activities there.

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 investments in to our schools is important when attracting industries. People want to know that the education system is and has quality standards. Also, continuing to provide dual enrollment which allows students to get a jump start on their future as well as advancing more technical studies at our TCT school.

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 support the Sportsplex at McFarland Mall. I believe that this location should have the same incentive opportunities with public dollars that have been invested, and offered in other development across the city.

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

Parks is essential to our community. I feel that we need to study the model of PARA and improvement upon it instead of replace it.

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?

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I support dual enrollment, the investment in to PRE-K, public safety, our transportation system, helping small businesses, and revitalization of our neighborhoods that exist within Elevate. During this time of the pandemic I feel that the issue of whether public funds should continue to be isolated for future projects shouldn't be our number one topic, but rather making sure we can sustain a solid economy to provide the essential services to the citizens of Tuscaloosa that pay the additional tax which birthed Elevate.

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

Yes, I support commercial air opportunities. Anything that will grow our economy and offer more opportunities.

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 have no problem with the way the budgets are utilized at this time.

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 am currently the finance chair for the city. I believe that we can better address spending if we limit useless studies.

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 the City is to have a REGIONAL SPORTSPLEX located at the old MCFARLAND MALL that will allow us to entertain the market that we can't do in this current day. My vision is growth within all sectors of the city. My part in that is to support the mission.