



## ASHEVILLE CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE

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### **1. What types of development do you think are appropriate for downtown Asheville? What types are inappropriate? Explain.**

I believe that new development downtown should respect our past and our current downtown. New buildings should not be vastly out of scale when compared to their surroundings. A six or eight story building next to existing two or four story structures seems reasonable to me. A 26-story building jammed against two and four story buildings seems like an affront to Asheville's citizens. The BB&T stands out as one of the most serious mistakes imposed on our cityscape.

Furthermore we need to pay particular attention to how new development affects the street. The driveways approved for the Ellington, for example will create a significant and generally repellent break on the sidewalk on Biltmore Ave, a major pedestrian shopping zone. Walkers will be dodging cars all the time. Bad plan, particularly with the same condition already existing across the street at the Pack Place parking garage.

I also seriously question the advisability of government investment in parking garages. The best evidence suggests that provision of parking decks increases traffic, which shouldn't be a city goal. Better to provide regular commuters with incentives to use public transit and restripe many street parking spaces for smaller cars with differential rates for big spaces and little ones.

### **2. How would you improve Asheville's Homeless plan and service system?**

I have contacted the makers of EDARs (carts with fold-out tents) <http://www.edar.org> and StreetSwags <http://www.streetswags.org> about manufacturing here in Asheville. I have also contacted a retired business owner whose career was in commercial sewing to get advice. For example, the residents of the new homeless veterans facility might provide a labor force that could be paid to produce housing aids for the homeless. (In fact, this could become a significant industry.)

I support permitting food provision in Pritchard and other city park areas and would like to create a day facility where the homeless could hang out (since the night shelters boot them during the day.)

I broadly support the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, although I think the name is illusory. We are not going to end a problem as old as civilization in the remaining seven years of that plan.

### **3. What initiatives would you undertake to make Asheville a greener city?**

I fully support the efforts that Council has made so far and the appointment of an Energy

Coordinator, but we need to ramp up quickly in the face of global climate change and the rapidly rising carbon level in the atmosphere. Simple changes like mandating recycled paper for all government printing are no-brainers and long overdue. (The procurement office told me that recycled costs more. I said, "Use less.") Gold LEED for new buildings is a good start, but we should be retrofitting the old ones now.

City-wide, I have been proposing a loan plan for the past two years, using municipal borrowing to create low-interest energy retrofit loans for home- and business-owners. It's working in other cities, and owners' total costs go down because of reduced energy use. I note that Brownie Newman and Robin Cape have advanced the idea in Council, if we elect a progressive majority this time we can do it.

I have a plan for voluntary water conservation that can reduce domestic water bills while building conservation infrastructure.

**4. Do you support a living wage for all city employees including contract labor? Yes  
Domestic partner benefits? Yes**

**5. What are the three best City Council achievements of the past four years?**

- 1) Creating the position of Energy Coordinator within the City Manager's office.
- 2) Blocking Tony Fraga's misguided tower development.
- 3) Launching the proposed Transit Master Plan

**6. List and explain three of your priorities for City Council during the upcoming four years.**

- 1) Election reform including voter-owned elections and instant run-off voting for city races.
- 2) "Green mortgages" for property owners, providing low interest loans for conservation retrofits.
- 3) Lobby Raleigh for an increase in Asheville's Room Tax, with the money dedicated to infrastructure improvements (water system, sidewalks, bike lanes, Civic Center upfit).

**7. What sets you apart from the other City Council candidates? Explain.**

The biggest difference I have with most of the others may be that I don't buy the myth that increasing the tax base is of benefit to current residents. In fact, everywhere it has been studied, growth, particularly rapid growth, costs residents more. So we pay for growth and we ought, therefore, to at least shape it. I reject the Chamber of Commerce slogan "Any way you like it." It should be "Any way WE like it."

In many ways, leadership in local government is a job I have prepared for all my life — as a builder, investigative reporter, lecturer on sustainability and community organizer. Whether founding an environmental journal and collaborating with environmental experts from around the world; building solar homes; teaching and tutoring at colleges, high schools and the Reid Center; addressing societal discord through my church and jail ministry; exposing a criminal sheriff; or organizing opposition to misguided development — I have endeavored to make Asheville a city that really works for all of us.

**8. If elected, how would you engage the citizenry of Asheville in helping to make decisions and accomplishing your goals?**

We need to drag government out of the 20th century, whether it likes it or not. In the age of Web 2.0, Facebook, Twitter and the rest, coupled with the new citizen engagement we saw in the

Obama campaign and in the explosion of blogging, there is no excuse to rely on antiquated public participation. Our current city council procedure, with a limited comment period at the end of unbearably long meetings tends to screen out many who would like to join in and who have valuable insights. I think public comment should be extended electronically, with creation of a membership-type comment site. (No anonymous trolls allowed, perhaps with a special designation for registered voters to identify the people who care enough to be active citizens.)

I have published online newsletters since 1995 and will continue to keep in touch with the people of this city, to elicit participation and input.

**9. Do you support President Obama's agenda, including his energy, health care and education initiatives?** Yes. (Albeit, recognizing that politics is the art of the possible, and he is more centrist than I.)

**Explain why or why not.**

**Energy:** As a green builder, starting in 1976, and an energy activist, dating back to membership in the Clamshell Alliance and going off the grid in 1979 (photovoltaic panels) to reduce demand for the Seabrook Nuclear Power Station, I am appalled at how long it has taken the world to recognize the looming energy shortages and climate crisis. The oil picture was made vivid during the oil embargo under Jimmy Carter, and the country laughed when he put on a sweater and turned down the thermostat. He was right. We have had no excuse since publication of Al Gore's *Earth in the Balance* in 1992. We suffered through two administrations during which a Republican Congress blocked all progress. We must tax carbon. Period.

**Health care:** We need single payer now. Short of that, we must have a meaningful public option. Now.

**Education:** As the bumper sticker has it, "If you think education is expensive, try the alternative." We should end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and put the money into education and health care. Obama's plan will get more people into college for the first time or for retraining. Teaching people to fish is much better than handing them fillets.

**10. Who are the five largest contributors to your campaign and how much did each contribute?**

\$500 each from Charlie Thomas, Asheville environmental activist; Michael Carlebach, an Asheville retiree; and John Wilson, West Asheville physician.

\$400 from Mark Noble, an Asheville commercial pilot.

\$300 each from Drew Cherner, a part-time college instructor from Asheville; and John Cram, owner of Blue Spiral Gallery.