

“Save the Eastside” Facebook Group Questionnaire

Questions for District 1 & District 5 Candidates

- **What will our East Charlotte representatives do ensure the parks and nature areas in our Districts are maintained regularly?**

I will maintain a productive relationship with members of County Parks and Recreation and expedite neighborhood/constituent applications for city assistance through the newly formed Housing and Neighborhood Services Department and Community Engagement Division- including neighborhood matching grants, canopy grants, and Keep Charlotte Beautiful beautification grants. Collaborative County-City approaches that engage the community, such as last month’s Coventry Woods mulch-laying at Cedarwood Park, are also effective. Moreover, East Charlotte green space, streetscape, and trails funding must be prioritized through the CNIP (comprehensive neighborhood investment program). The development of Eastland will spark the shifting of CNIP funding from Center City to our area.

- **What is your vision for the Eastland Mall site?**

Contrary to the Jacobs phase 1 report, I have an 8-point plan that emphasizes the placement of an economic driver at Eastland. It includes a stimulus package to attract retail business, shops, and restaurants to the site (via investment grants, subsidies, loans, amenities, and tax incentives), along with interspersed streetscape amenities and greenspace connecting to the Campbell Creek greenway. This will establish an immediately impactful local economic driver for our area- creating jobs, increasing property values, improving our schools, and instituting a much needed East Charlotte attraction that keeps our consumer dollars in our community and brings outside dollars in. My plan also includes an incremental busing and streetcar proposal for the Central Avenue corridor, sparked by Eastland’s development. This will function to create an International District along Central Avenue that will be a regional attraction delivering even more prosperity to our area. I don’t preclude the possibility of an MLS stadium as an option at Eastland, but it’s not my primary preference because it would only lead to seasonal, sporadic, and limited economic stimulus for our area and MLS has made it clear that it will not be awarding a franchise unless the stadium is downtown.

- **East Charlotte has a high percentage of low income housing compared to other districts. What are your thoughts and do you have a plan to make this more evenly spread throughout the City?**

Our city is in the middle of an affordable housing crisis and it undoubtedly needs more affordable housing stock. However, as per the city’s Opportunity Task Force report, it is imperative that additional affordable housing be evenly distributed throughout Charlotte to promote upward mobility and ensure that every Charlottean has equal access to living-wage jobs, quality transportation options, and good schools. With upwards of 40% of affordable housing currently residing in East Charlotte, it would do affordable housing residents as well as our existing community little good to continue placing more affordable housing here. This is particularly true given our current job and transportation needs. Alternatively, affordable housing stock can be increased in other areas via smart rezoning/planning approvals tied to subsidies, amenities, and tax grants (TIGS) when necessary.

- **East Charlotte has allowed the zoning of many undesirable businesses in our area (junk yards, pawn shops, check cashing, etc) which bring down the value of our area. Do you have any thoughts or plans on removing these businesses and replacing with more desirable retail, restaurants, etc in our area?**

These businesses are a current reflection of our community and would not exist but for the socioeconomic need that exists here in East Charlotte. Of course, all of this will change as our area is revitalized and the demand for the services these businesses provide subsequently dries up. Getting to that point will require a comprehensive approach emphasizing job creation, transportation growth, public safety, and quality schools. We also will need relentless community engagement to compel members of city staff and our elected officials to listen to our needs and provide the necessary funding to implement our ideas. Coincidentally, it wouldn't hurt to have someone like myself, who has established a working relationship with city staff and all of our elected representatives for over half a decade, working on the inside for us. At the same time, undesirable businesses can be isolated within the current unified development ordinance (UDO) process and neighborhoods can be protected through neighborhood conservation overlay districts. Once revitalization has begun, new business (ie. retail, restaurants, etc.) can be attracted through subsidies, amenities, tax grants, and the overall promise and character of our community.

- **What are your thoughts on bringing MLS to Charlotte? Would it be a good for the Eastland property?**

I am not against bringing MLS to Charlotte. However, I am against taxpayers subsidizing a billionaire's venture, to the tune of \$30 million plus, with no apparent incentives for local infrastructure, transportation, small business, or the environment. I was the only candidate present at the economic development committee meeting when Marcus Smith delivered his MLS pitch and I distinctly remember Mr. Smith's primary concern being whether he could consistently fill a 20,000 person capacity stadium (eg. make money) and not how MLS would benefit the surrounding area and Charlotte as a whole. Making matters worse is the fact that the proposal currently lacks any clawback provision to recoup our investment should the venture tank. Instead of doubling down on the amount being spent out of our hotel/motel tax fund, I think our money would be better used on expanding transportation options to Bojangles' Arena/Ovens (light rail), the creation of a Central Avenue International District, or developing Eastland. At this moment, MLS has made it clear that it would not award a team unless a stadium is built downtown and that does not appear to be changing given MLS' expansion options elsewhere. Nevertheless, I would be willing to entertain the notion of a stadium being built at Eastland should circumstances change. It wouldn't be my first choice, though, because I would prefer a steady economic driver, with multiple features, on the site rather than a single facility providing only seasonal, sporadic, and limited economic stimulus for our area.

- **What are the plans to improve the Albemarle Road corridor?**

The western portion of the Albemarle Road corridor will be greatly enhanced by the development of Eastland and the implementation of the proposed CNIP streetscape project- calling for sidewalk and intersection improvements, Campbell Creek greenway beautification and connectivity, and a possible skatepark. However, none of this is currently funded by the city and must be a point of emphasis for our next City Council representative (hopefully me) in the upcoming budgetary cycle. On the eastern portion of the corridor, there are issues concerning infrastructure, food, and transportation. I met with city staff about this in May and discovered that these areas are not included in the CNIP and that these issues were not well known. Therefore, drawing attention to the needs of eastern Albemarle is also a must. Planning Department emphasis must be placed on delivering adequate lighting and road repair to our emerging immigrant

communities (possibly through city-driven revitalization efforts) in the area, recruiting a grocer (Aldi, Henry's, Compare, etc.), and establishing bus routes in the area through CDOT.

➤ **What are your thoughts/plans to reduce/eliminate the empty buildings that have become such an eyesore to our great area?**

The in rem demolition process can currently take over a year to complete and there are too many hurdles for neighborhoods to clear within it. This, of course, leaves dilapidated properties in our community that reduce our property values and create safety hazards. This process can be improved and expedited by amending our City Housing Code to eliminate unnecessarily lengthy proceedings and empower Code Enforcement with additional autonomy. As an attorney and someone who has successfully amended city law before, I am uniquely qualified to tackle this problem. From the standpoint of commercial buildings, I favor an approach of exploring redevelopment possibilities before demolition, including subsidies and rezoning where necessary. This was, and still is, our hope with the Varnadore building at the corner of Albemarle and Independence.

➤ **Will you be open to working to create a bi-partisan relationship within City Council and with the constituents regardless of party affiliation?**

Absolutely. I will work in the best interests of East Charlotte and, in so doing, work with whomever supports our interests regardless of party affiliation. That's why I would have supported Councilman Drigg's motion to fund the Link project with hotel/motel tax dollars last month and why I worked across the aisle and built bi-partisan support to pass my Citizens Review Board amendment in 2013. It takes six votes to get any proposal passed on the Council and sometimes that can be hard to come by. Partisanship and divisiveness makes it even harder. I pledge to not engage in those games because I'm sick of our side of town struggling and understand that we will only succeed with a unified front.

➤ **What are your thoughts/plans regarding bringing the Light Rail to East Charlotte?**

Light rail is an essential component of revitalizing the Independence Boulevard corridor. Although it won't likely lead to a Southend type of resurgence, it will spur economic growth and aesthetically reshape the embarrassing eyesore that the Eastway thru Harris Boulevard stretch has become. This is true despite the new retail and used car dealership going in at Coliseum Center. It will also raise surrounding property values and, likewise, provide an incentive to increase funding to our East Charlotte schools. As a transportation option, it will provide an inexpensive mode of access to downtown and elsewhere for our local residents (for work, entertainment, etc.), include pedestrian connectivity projects across the Independence corridor, and decrease our city's environmental footprint- possibly opening the door to federal grants in the future. However, the catch is that it is currently not funded and there is no indication that it will actually be funded in the foreseeable future- with every other area in Charlotte and even municipalities outside of our city receiving priority attention. As our next City Council representative, I will fight to ensure that funding is allocated to East Charlotte light rail and support budding projects, like the Varnadore project, that will serve as catalysts to making it happen.

➤ **Given the latest news regarding City Council travel in the media, what type of events do you think are valid/will you be attending to assist us in growing and improving East Charlotte and our City?**

Elected officials are stewards of the public trust and have a responsibility to spend taxpayer dollars in a way that serves the best interests of the people and is not intended for personal gain. In my estimation, it is therefore a violation of the public trust when taxpayer dollars are spent on representatives attending self-serving fundraisers, PAC events, and VIP parties. I would never do that. On the other hand, there are viable travel expenses for events that promote the general welfare by providing valuable training and information

sessions, helping develop policy-based strategies and best governmental practices, and that build relationships between local, state, and federal government officials. Two renowned non-partisan organizations that specialize in events of this kind, specifically geared for municipal officials, are the National League of Cities and the North Carolina League of Municipalities. Each organization holds at least one constructive event per year and all of our City Councilmembers regularly attend. These events are relatively inexpensive and I would most likely attend to move the needle forward on job creation, transportation growth, and quality schools for us here in East Charlotte.

➤ **Do you have any plans on how to bring more jobs to East Charlotte?**

Yes. We do have purchasing power (consumer dollars) here in East Charlotte and businesses, that will create jobs, can thrive here so long as city planners make their success a priority. This would require only a small investment out of the city's nearly 2.5 billion dollar yearly budget to provide for subsidized loans, amenities grants, and tax incentives (TIGs). If done right, business success and growth will then snowball as consumers from outside our area travel to spend their money here. More businesses will subsequently open and even more jobs will be created. This will be particularly true as our local image is retooled. A lynchpin for this effort is Eastland and ensuring commercial/retail development on the site- which is the most rational approach if the city is serious about solving our upward mobility crisis. It makes little sense to continue to maintain an employment desert in our area and, likewise, require our lower-income community to travel for the same consumer goods that other areas of town have in their backyards when we have an opportunity to solve the problem with a modest economic stimulus investment locally.

➤ **In your opinion, why is growth & redevelopment lagging in East Charlotte compared to other parts of the city and neighboring communities/counties?**

It's lagging here because we have not been set up to succeed. I remember a time when Independence Boulevard was a bustling corridor and Eastland Mall was the attraction in our region. That, of course, was before the emergence of South Charlotte, Center City, and areas of North Charlotte. We sacrificed and suffered decline as our taxpayer dollars built those areas and now it's time for the city to give back. As other parts of Charlotte have received prime development projects despite rising property values, received light rail and its resulting economic stimulus, and have been provided endless subsidies for job creation, we have continually been pushed to the back of the line. Our property values have bottomed out, our schools now fail, and our reputation has become damaged. Given the circumstances, it's no wonder why parents don't want to raise their children here and businesses steer clear. It's now up to the city to help us out by investing in the projects, like Eastland, that will turn things around here in East Charlotte. They owe it to us.

➤ **How do District 1 and 5 representatives plan to work together to create a more cohesive East Charlotte?**

Our two districts have a lot in common and it will take a joint effort to develop Eastland, revitalize the Independence and Central Avenue corridors, and improve our schools. I have known Patsy Kinsey and Larken Egleston for years, working with each of them on successful initiatives, and I am confident that my pre-existing working relationship with both will continue yielding positive results for our collective districts regardless of who is elected by voters. However, it is important to note that what we really need is an East Charlotte block on City Council to dramatically move the ball forward. That means more than just two councilmembers who will consistently rally behind, and vote for, what is good for us here in East Charlotte. South Charlotte currently has four people, constituting ready-made votes, from its area on Council (2 District and 2 At-Large). Given our voting strength, there's no reason why we couldn't have four in the future ourselves.

➤ **What marketing initiatives can/should be implemented to combat the current media's deplorable portrayal of East Charlotte?**

We must champion and promote those qualities that set us apart and make us great as a community. Essentially, we change the negative narrative by accentuating the positive. For example, it's documented fact that East Charlotteans take care of one another in times of need. When the Woodscape fire occurred, it was the community that came together and helped our homeless neighbors. Many of us went the extra mile, contributing clothing, toiletries, food, and water on an unprecedented scale. New Hope Baptist Church's gymnasium was filled to the rafters with local donations. All I needed to do was make a few phone calls and local businesses stepped up to the plate- QuickTrip, Bojangles', Hawthorne's Pizzeria, and Libretto's Pizzeria all freely donated to the cause. I'm hard-pressed to say this same thing would have happened elsewhere. This, among other things, is why it's great to live in East Charlotte and why we can be proud to call ourselves East Charlotteans. Our next City Council representative will possess a pulpit to speak to the greater Charlotte region and, if I am honored enough to be that person, I will promote all the good that is happening here and all the reasons why everyone should want to live in East Charlotte.

➤ **What are your plans-of-attack for maintaining continued community outreach? How exactly will you involve yourself with the neighborhoods?**

Community outreach and organization is essential to effectuating productive policy change for all. If elected, I will continue to have a presence on facebook and think that regular forums, town halls, and community meetings are a good idea. I also think that it's important to have a direct line of communication available for everyone in our district to personally reach me with any issues or concerns. This would include a phone number everyone can call me on and an email address where I can be contacted. I will continue to speak regularly with community leaders and continue to attend as many neighborhood/homeowners association meetings and community events as possible to stay informed. I will also work with community leaders to announce important information and updates through their respective networks. My goal is to be readily accessible and responsive to the needs of everyone in district 5. I will do my best to keep everyone informed as to the issues concerning our district and what actions we need to collectively take to address them.

➤ **Give us an example of something you've fought tooth-and-nail for (and ideally won). How will that experience prepare you, if at all, for fighting for East Charlotte residents wants and needs.**

In early 2013, I co-founded an effort to amend our city's Citizen's Review Board ordinance. In doing so, I personally wrote a 40-page report incorporating my findings from the 50 largest municipalities in the country and drafted model ordinance amendments for our City Council's review. I then organized 11 community organizations (incorporating representation from every political party) in support of my report. Over the course of the year, I attended regular stakeholder, committee, and City Council meetings and leveraged relationships with city staff and Councilmembers. After winning bi-partisan Councilmember support, my amendment was unanimously passed in late 2013. Throughout the tedious process of getting the amendment passed, my expertise as an attorney, ability to unite various groups of people together, and knowledge of government proceedings were critical to getting the job done. I will bring this same skillset and background to the table as our next City Council District 5 representative and will deliver similar success for our community.