The Asheville Downtown Association periodically surveys its members and the community to get feedback on issues and challenges facing downtown. We’ll utilize this feedback to formulate the questions included in this survey.

The top issues noted in the survey for maintaining the vibrancy of downtown are: supporting local businesses, safety, more parking/transportation options, maintenance of infrastructure, addressing homelessness and affordable/workforce housing.

**Downtown Issues Questionnaire for Asheville City Council Candidates**

**YOUR NAME:** Dee Williams

**QUESTION:** Please tell us why you are running for City Council.
I am running for City Council because I want to use my business skills in solving infrastructure, economic diversification, financial solvency, and wealth gap disparities in Asheville.

**QUESTION:** What do you feel are downtown’s most pressing challenges?
Infrastructure, parking and dedicated sources to finance all, along with the requisite courage by elected leaders, cleanliness, and the lack of investment in local small businesses. We also need “gateway” signage Downtown.

**QUESTION:** What is the role of downtown in the greater Asheville community?
It is the “living room” of the City, as well as the cultural, artistic, and financial center of Asheville.

**QUESTION:** What smart growth strategies and funding mechanisms would you employ to support thoughtful growth in downtown that increases the city's tax base while also maintaining its character?

I would use wholly dedicated sources of revenue which would be used for cleanliness, safety, and maintenance of Downtown. I would invoke an accommodations tax as a solely dedicated source of revenue to be used to improve and maintain the Downtown area. We also need to coordinate land use with transportation planning and to fund dedicated sources of revenue to develop multi-modal transportation and look at ways to facilitate fewer cards in Downtown, like Trolley systems that pick passengers up for free and take them throughout Downtown (we could use fare free zones throughout with Transit), once we have a dedicated revenue stream, as well as a great
system of greenways and bike lanes to provide connectivity to Downtown (we need a dedicated revenue source.

**ISSUE:** Supporting local business  
**QUESTION:** What strategies would you employ to ensure the sustainability of small locally owned businesses in downtown?

I would provide space to them in an “incubator” or comparable Downtown space that had parking attached to it. I would also match them up with Mentors or matured business owners. I would like to write all City specifications so we could buy locally, and I would like to set up accounts receivable financing with one of the development banks or Credit Unions so they would lend to them with purchase orders (executed) from the City. I will develop a local Supplier Council to facilitate this Buy Local Program and I would garner support/membership from the County and the anchor employers of this region. These businesses must be helped to achieve “scale”. This buy local Council(s) will reduce our carbon footprint, as well.

**ISSUE:** Parking/Transportation  
**QUESTION:** What improvements to our parking, transit system and alternative transportation options would you advocate for to ease pressure on the parking system?

I will develop a system where we tie land use or the different areas to connectivity using everything but cars. We must define our land use patterns like Neighborhoods, Industrial areas, Green Space, CBD – (Mixed Use), Highway and correlate them by way of development to building in multi-modal transportation systems, whether bikes, pedestrian, or Transit. This must be funded (wholly dedicated funding source with absolute citizen input and transparency), so I would work to dedicate a certain amount of cents of sales tax to it for multimodal transportation.

**ISSUE:** Safety  
**QUESTION:** How would you work with the police department to ensure adequate resources to maintain public safety? What strategies would you employ to address the concerns regarding policing brought forth during the recent budget conversation?

I am working on these concerns as Chairman of the NAACP Criminal Justice Committee. I initiated the process of reviewing traffic stop disparities as a verifiable set of data points which we could use to begin the conversation about what constitutes “quality policing” or having police officers, who know how to do community policing, are well-trained, and well-paid. The issues of retainage are centered on poor pay and moral due to being over-worked. My strategy was to resolve some of the disparities, based on the data so that we could enhance safety for officers and the public. The “end game” involved having performance metrics using this data and have our various organizations and individuals, particularly the minority community solicit a major grant
from the U.S. Department of Justice to make Asheville Police Department a model for the nation, by substantial pay raises, world class training, and a police force that sets standards throughout the country.

**ISSUE:** Infrastructure  
**QUESTION:** Identify your top three downtown infrastructure needs. How would you prioritize funding for these projects and how do you feel infrastructure impacts business success? Parking – cleanliness and maintenance of lots, better sidewalks and cleaner sidewalks, more pedestrian adherence to laws by enforcement, better lighting, better traffic controls(synchronization). We also need really nice “gateway signage” in Downtown and district entrances with nice signs, etc.

**ISSUE:** Homelessness  
**QUESTION:** What steps would you take to support the Homeless Initiative Advisory Committee’s 5-year plan released earlier this year? What other strategies or initiatives would you consider to address homelessness in our community? Faster re-housing with supportive services. Permanently affordable housing with graduated, supportive options using a Community Land Trust model. Traveler’s Aid to get them a ticket out of Asheville, if they choose.

**ISSUE:** Affordable/Workforce Housing  
**QUESTION:** What is your position on housing diversity in downtown? How would you direct staff to utilize funds from the recently passed Affordable Housing Bond? What other strategies would you like to see our city develop to address the affordability issue?

A permanently affordable Community Land Trust on City-owned land taken during Urban Renewal, which they have already allocated $1 million for capitalization of a CLT.

What is your 5-year vision for Downtown? More activities that diversify the economy away from the over-proliferation of eateries and so many of the same types of businesses. We need to recruit smaller corporate regional businesses to co-locate downtown to diversify and bring jobs, along with a performing arts center. We are going to need to bring some diverse kinds of businesses/retailers. Asheville needs a mix of retailers that open after 6 p.m. (70% of consumer spending happens after 6:00 pm- tourists and locals). We will have at least two “anchor” businesses that folks will drive to see. Asheville will become a desired destination for conventions and conferences. We will have local “pioneers”, like Roger McGuire was, with “patient capital. The number of people living Downtown on upper floors of retail buildings has increased by over 30%. We will invest in more public restrooms to get folks out of their cars – open 24 hours a day. Transit will have free fare from 7 p.m. until 11 p.m. More gathering places outside are developed and they have grass, seating, and music. Tell merchants to get rid of “closed” signs. WE have open air markets with live entertainment in more than one area of Downtown.
Any further comments you’d like to include concerning Downtown Asheville?