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 Gwen Wisler

QUESTION: Please tell us why you are running for City Council. I want Asheville to be a safe, vibrant, healthy and accessible city. These are the values that have been guiding my decisions on Council during my tenure.

QUESTION: What do you feel are downtown’s most pressing challenges? Safety and accessibility to locals.

QUESTION: What is the role of downtown in the greater Asheville community? Clearly downtown is a gem to the city. It is all of Asheville’s neighborhood.

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? Continue to support the Economic Development Coalition to incentivize businesses to move/grow in Asheville, focus on diversifying our economy to reduce dependency on tourism, re-look at a business improvement district.

ISSUE: Supporting local business
QUESTION: What strategies would you employ to ensure the sustainability of small locally owned businesses in downtown? Explore legal opportunities to discourage franchise openings in the downtown area. Continue to encourage people to shop local.

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? Improve technology – add more parking lots to the AVL Parking app, make businesses more aware of the technology available. We’ve improved the transit system during my tenure including adding Sunday service and altering the management system under which the transit system operates. I’ve advocated for a ride sharing service for downtown employees. Increase participation in the Passport program by downtown employers. Increase bicycle infrastructure including on-street bicycle parking and bike lanes.

**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 was supportive of the police department’s addition of a downtown division; I think this will help with more effective community policing in the downtown areas.

**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? Sidewalks, bicycle needs and pedestrian needs. I believe infrastructure all over Asheville has been delayed; the bond programming will help with these issues.

**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? The City has assisted in funding programs for Homeward Bound. I hope to continue that funding. I believe the 5-year plan is well-thought out and definitely involves the whole community. I would like to see Mission Health System and/or MAHEC be a part of the HIAC as mental health and/or addiction issues need to be part of the solution.

**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? I would like to see more housing in the downtown area. Of the $25 million for the Affordable Housing Bond, we’ve tentatively allocated $15 million for developing City-owned property. The remaining $10 million has been proposed to be divided up as $5 million for the Housing Trust Fund, $3 million for land banking, $1 million for down payment assistance and $1 million for investment in a community land trust. I think this is a good starting point. But before going forward with some of these allocations, I have numerous questions so I’ll be working to get answers before I vote on specifics.
What is your 5-year vision for Downtown? Maintain its character. Diversify the businesses. Make it more inviting to locals.

Any further comments you’d like to include concerning Downtown Asheville?