



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 Mayoral Candidates

YOUR NAME: Jonathan Wainscott

QUESTION: Please tell us why you are running for Mayor.

A: Elections for public office are chances for the public to direct how our governance will be maintained. They bring into light the performance of incumbents seeking to continue their service and bring forth new ideas and visions from challengers. It is my goal to offer a review of the current Mayor's, Esther Manheimer's, as well as the current City Council's performance of civic leadership, and elucidate exactly what is possible for the Mayor and City Council to accomplish with its leadership.

The power of the Mayor of Asheville is quite small. The Mayor does not run the city. In essence, Mayor of Asheville is a figurehead position, more symbolic in leadership than having actual power. That being said, it is the duty of City Council as a governing body to direct City Staff to fulfill the desires and address the concerns of the citizen shareholders of the City of Asheville. Council has unfortunately become a rubber stamp committee which does not direct Staff effectively, or review the performance of Staff with any amount of vigor. I plan on bringing more power back to the elected representatives of our city and initiate proactive policies that are congruous with the wishes of the people.

QUESTION: What do you feel are downtown's most pressing challenges?

A: Quite certainly the greatest challenge of downtown Asheville is to comfortably, safely, and happily accommodate the needs of all the people who occupy our public spaces. Vibrant public spaces attract tourists, small and large business and their employees and customers, use by local residents, as well as the impoverished and homeless. All of us that use and enjoy downtown create a wake of our own, be that by adding to traffic congestion, producing waste (both consumer and bodily), requiring emergency services, and consuming resources.

Downtown struggles with cleanliness which should be easily rectified by having more trash and recycling receptacles emptied more often. City sidewalks are in disrepair and business owners are charged with the responsibility of keeping them clean and the rare case, cleared of snow. The task of keeping public sidewalks clean and passable is that of the city and the burden of this task should not be passed off to the business owners.

Business owners should not have to accommodate the personal hygiene and toileting needs of all the people that use downtown, but there is a limited amount of public restrooms. While some may fear that more public restrooms will only be commandeered by our homeless occupants of downtown, I believe we can manage to provide clean and safe bathrooms that meet the standards of our well-heeled guests as well all the others in town. Providing appropriate facilities for people to do their business is good for business.

Parking and traffic are also problematic in regards to accommodating the human use of downtown. I don't believe that adding more parking garages in the middle of town will help as this only attracts more people to drive through town to

park. Perhaps we should be building parking garages on the perimeter of downtown, strategically located near other economic hubs around town, and provide shuttle service to downtown and between other hubs.

QUESTION: What is the role of downtown in the greater Asheville community?

A: Asheville is the county seat for Buncombe County. From the Tax Assessor's office, to the Buncombe County Courthouse, Asheville is the municipality where issues of county concerns take place. Unfortunately our neighbors from the county are too often seen as less important than our visiting guests. "Downtown" is the nucleus of every town and city and the fundamental functions of downtown need to support the townsfolk first.

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?

A: I believe in the fundamental tradition of government having a *laissez faire* involvement with business. I'm not going to lay out a "smart-growth" strategy focused on giving a few property owners access to any "funding mechanisms". That's not the job of City Council. The job of City Council is to make sure Staff is effectively implementing policies that support the needs of our occupants. Making sure our streets and thoroughfares are clean and safe is the job of City Council. I will not offer an economic template for a select few to demonstrate they are following in an effort to gain funding from the public in order for those select few to make money.

As for maintaining the "character" of our wonderful city, I must ask, exactly what is that character you wish to maintain? The quaint Appalachian town that offers an international, cosmopolitan flair has so many different requirements that it is hard to define our character. At this point, the trajectory of Asheville becoming nothing other than a playground for tourists doesn't seem to be changing in the slightest, and we are losing our "hometown" roots. I am more concerned with changing the character of the Mayor's office and City Council from one which currently has a reputation for caring more about the economic potential of a few than it does about meeting the basic needs of all.

ISSUE: Supporting local business

QUESTION: What strategies would you employ to ensure the sustainability of small locally owned businesses in downtown?

A: I would advocate for the absolute abolishment of the hotel room tax as it is currently implemented and ask for the requirements of a new occupancy tax to be limited for use of improving our essential services. As it is, our occupancy tax on hotel room "sales" can only be used to promote more tourism in Asheville. This is resulting in a very effective sales pitch to very affluent people from very far away which means we are attracting bigger fish to our small pond. Big fish eat little fish and big, non-native fish can become invasive and destroy the original habitat. As more wealthy investors from far away descend upon Asheville, property values increase to levels so high that that small, locally owned businesses are taken over by bigger, non-local investment groups and those investment groups are just as interested in funding mechanisms as locals.

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?

A: I would like to study the idea of having parking garages in areas between downtown and other economic hubs like Tunnel Road, Smokey Park Highway, Hendersonville Road, etc. which are serviced by shuttles that can take workers, tourists, and locals into town and to other hubs. I would like to see better street name signage (over the streets and roads, rather than on a single corner of an intersection) so drivers can see further in advance where they are. I also want to require the address number to be a part of any signage used by businesses. GPS doesn't necessarily keep things moving. Eventually, your eyeballs have to coordinate with the info from your iPhone and looking around for street addresses and street names slows down traffic and can result in fender-benders or worse.

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?

A: My 2013 City Council campaign platform included creating an auxiliary police unit which is dedicated to servicing non-violent incidents like property damage, theft, and car accidents. We have a unique problem in Asheville in regards to the high number of tourists that visit our downtown as well as other areas in the city. I do not believe we need to use fully armed police officers to respond to stolen purse and graffiti reports. I would like to see units of “peace officers”, a green squad if you will, which have the same level of authority as any LEOs, but these officers would be UNARMED, tending to non-violent civil infractions, property crimes, etc. These officers would be included in radio communications with traditional blue-squad officers for immediate assistance. This would provide a new type of involvement between police and the public that is focused on serving while our traditional officers can maintain focus on protecting. We need more a little bit more protection. We need a lot more service. We need to solve our unique problems with unique solutions.

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?

A: Let me answer that last part first. How does infrastructure impact business success? Well, cities are built on infrastructure. Without infrastructure, you don't have a city. You don't even have a farm. Something without an infrastructure is called a campsite.

Our downtown infrastructure is certainly more complex than the infrastructure required to run a farm. Roads and sidewalks are paramount to the infrastructure of a downtown in Anywhere, USA. The biggest infrastructure problem we have in Asheville is our aging water and sewer system and these systems generally run beneath our crumbling roads and sidewalks. We need to take a hard look at the quality of the water system we fought so hard to keep in the hands of our citizens. There is no point in repaving and building new sidewalks over rusting water lines that will burst (do burst, everyday) only to jack-hammer and dig up our newly paved pathways to continue to patch up our most vital infrastructure need buried beneath our roads. Utilities like electricity, cable, and phone lines are also critical infrastructure elements and the placement of utility poles need to be moved out of our sidewalks...somehow. Storm water control rounds out the top 3 infrastructure needs, both downtown and in the city at large. Keeping our storm drains free of trash, debris, and leaves keeps our storm water system running as designed. With money collected from storm water fees, we should be able to spend more on cleaning our streets, to keep the storm drains working properly.

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?

A: Homelessness is certainly a community-wide issue. Homeless people are attracted to the downtown because that is where services and opportunity exist for them, whether that is placement in a shelter or asking for money from the people walking around town. We can talk all day about attracting businesses that pay living wages and the need for more mental health care for everyone, but the fact remains that we live in North Carolina, a state that works very hard to keep people poor and keep people from obtaining mental health care. We could build some really nice shelters. We could fund a really great mental health clinic and establish working connections between social service offices and nonprofit agencies, and we should. The problem is that Asheville will be providing so much more assistance to the homeless that that will attract even more homeless people from the outlying areas that are less sympathetic to human rights and needs. They War on Poverty will not be won from the office of Mayor in Asheville, North Carolina. I wish I had an answer to ending homelessness. That's never going to happen until we, as humans, decide it is our moral imperative not to let our brothers and sisters starve, to commit on a very deep level to take care of all the needs of everyone on Earth. Until then, we will just be shifting problems around and locking people up for being poor and mentally ill.

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: I'm not sure what is meant by "housing diversity". In regards to directing staff as to how the bond money should be spent, well, first no money can be spent from the bond money until the bonds are issued and that won't happen until the lawsuits claiming the bond referendum was not handled appropriately are settled. Additionally, our City Manager is now claiming that all the bond money will go into the General Fund and the advertised uses of the three bond packages don't need to be adhered to. Anyone expecting funding from the recent passing of the bond referendum needs to make a Plan B.

As for practical ways to address affordable housing, we simply can't work on this on the supply side of the economic equation. Soon we will be collecting \$17,600,000 (and growing) annually from the hotel room occupancy tax. Seventy-five percent of that money, over 13 million dollars a year, must be spent on advertising Asheville as a tourist destination. We are paying millions and millions of dollars to convince people that Asheville is the best place on Earth and that marketing effort has succeed in creating a huge demand for little Asheville. With demand for space in Asheville so high, supply can't meet the demand. The only way to affect the cost of housing and commercial space is to stop making it a high priced commodity that can only be afforded by people moving here from much more expensive places. Having a land development attorney as Mayor certainly isn't helping. My strategy to change this is to eliminate the hotel occupancy tax that is funding and fueling the land rush on Asheville, and to replace the current Mayor.

What is your 5-year vision for Downtown?

A: More trash cans, yellow curbs for no parking zones so we can get unnecessary signage out of the sidewalks, Peace Officers helping citizens and visitors, clean and safe public restrooms, better road signage, and more locals enjoying the use of our town.

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

I reject the notion that "adding to the tax base" is a worthwhile reason for building on every last scrap of land in Asheville. We have been adding the tax base by way of new construction and increased property values and we still have to borrow money to (try) and bring our infrastructure up to speed. Asheville is awash with money and it's being mismanaged. We need to bring full transparency to all of our financial transactions.