

YOUR NAME: Kim Roney

**QUESTION:** Please tell us why you are running for City Council. As a music teacher and service industry worker serving on the City's Multi-Modal Transportation Commission, and relying on active & public transportation, I bring a unique perspective to Asheville City Council. Asheville is at a critical turning point and needs courageous leaders to address affordability; to value public input at the beginning of decisions around development, childcare & education, and the environment; and to prioritize support of a resilient community from within through our budget & policies. This means getting real about racial equity and social justice as we address neighborhoods, local ecology, police funds use, and more.

**QUESTION:** What do you feel are downtown's most pressing challenges? Parking is among the biggest concerns I hear from business owners, workers, and the community at large. As property value and rents continue to rise, and news businesses move to town, amplifying and protecting our local and independently-owned business community is very important to me. Our city center is at risk to be a playground for the wealthy visitor, but can be so much better as a place where we live, work, and play together.

**QUESTION:** What is the role of downtown in the greater Asheville community? Downtown is the heart of the City, the economic engine of our tourist economy, and a thriving center for public events which bring locals together from across the city, as well as a hub for health & human services in the county. For these reasons, Downtown often functions as a first impression to visitors and developers, and is therefore experiencing great change, while remaining one of the most historic parts of town. In many ways, Downtown Asheville represents the balance that Asheville is working to find as city.

**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? We need apartments Downtown that working people of Asheville living within the 30-40% AMI can afford, promoting active transportation and increased quality of life for people who live here. Incentives for locally-owned businesses, especially for those paying a living wage, is one way to grow and maintain the originality of Asheville that currently provides our tax base. Decades of policies, red-lining, and gentrification have shuttered or pushed out thriving businesses among communities of color, and that needs to be a consideration when addressing the economic health and sustainability of our city.

**ISSUE:** Supporting local business

**QUESTION:** What strategies would you employ to ensure the sustainability of small locally owned businesses in downtown? Asheville must continue support of local businesses, working with organizations like the Asheville Grown Business Alliance, who have invested in our vibrant, local economy. By supporting policies that value independent businesses instead of major chains and corporations, we can focus on cooperative & employee ownership, as well as businesses owned by minorities and women. The people of Asheville are remarkably dedicated, and need leaders who prioritize living wages, land trusts, energy-efficient business practices, and collaborative efforts to offset the rising cost of running a business in one of the fastest gentrifying cities in the country. This means going above and beyond the language in our final draft of the Comprehensive Plan and our outdated UDO to champion a better, more resilient economy that doesn't just walk the tight-rope of relying so heavily on tourism.

**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? It's time for Asheville to join other cities across the state and the country in a move toward fare-free transit. Transportation via bus provides access to jobs, housing, education, child care and groceries. Going fare-free could potentially save the City of Asheville money by eliminating the impending investment in proposed fare boxes, which would cost upwards of \$15,000 per bus. Other cities that have gone fare-free realized the fares generated barely cover the expenses of collecting fares, purchasing and maintaining fare boxes, accounting costs, and managing the funds that are collected.

In 2006, Asheville Redefines Transit (ART) was offering fare-free for 90 days. The invitation to attract new riders included the same reasons as it would now:

- Reduction of transportation costs.
- Not having to deal with traffic & parking.
- A more environmentally conscious commute with less energy consumption and emissions.

As a member of the City of Asheville's Multimodal Transportation Commission and Transit Committee, I am advocating every day for people, like myself, who rely on public transit, and I continue to support improvements to our transit system. I would propose using additional funds from our city's parking revenue to offset additional costs, because more commuters using the bus will have a positive impact on parking demand downtown and city-wide. This would directly utilize funds from the tourists enjoying our town and put hundreds of dollars spent on transportation back into the pockets of the people of Asheville - the people who need it the most.

#### **ISSUE: Safety**

**QUESTION:** How would you work with the police department to ensure adequate resources to maintain public safety?

Our current City Council missed an opportunity to pass a resolution to adopt the policy suggestions presented about the racial bias in traffic stops, with data driven solutions tested in our own state of North Carolina, as presented by Ian Mance of the Southern Coalition of Social Justice and organized by Patrick Conant and Dee Williams, representing the local chapter of the NAACP. While we have seen a commitment from Chief Hooper to review and revise APD's current use-of-force policies in collaboration with members from the Racial Justice Coalition and other community groups, the need for accountability around law enforcement officer's training and implementation around trauma-informed care, deescalation and implicit bias training remains a high priority. We need brave leadership from elected officials to actively engage with our police department to improve police-community relations. Safety for ALL of Asheville's people is a shared value in our community.

What strategies would you employ to address the concerns regarding policing brought forth during the recent budget conversation?

The budget our current City Council passed was a weak attempt to pit folks against each other, rather than an opportunity to lift us all up together. It dramatically increased transportation funding, but then increased a budget for APD that will eventually double the police presence downtown. It was a shallow attempt at people-pleasing, that lacked true transparency from the outset, undermining the true needs of our city. We did not need a sizeable increase in police officers while the department has been struggling to fill open positions. Perhaps retention issues are in part because property taxes, rents, and the general cost of living inside the city limits keeps going up, which this budget would exacerbate. Perhaps it's because we haven't invested in the kind of deep training and support that our existing officers need to do a different kind of policing so they can go home knowing they've completed a job well-done. But trying to hire still more officers isn't the solution. Now is the time to hear the voice of the people and the positive solutions that they've brought to the table by prioritizing building up our community from within.

#### ISSUE: Infrastructure

**QUESTION:** Identify your top three downtown infrastructure needs. Affordable housing, pedestrian infrastructure through sidewalk and crosswalk maintenance, and updates to the transit center.

**How would you prioritize funding for these projects and how do you feel infrastructure impacts business success?** Through scrupulous evaluation of our budget and careful implementation of the bonds, we can make investments that will benefit the people who live in Asheville, which will have a positive, lasting impact in our local business community.

#### ISSUE: Homelessness

**QUESTION:** What steps would you take to support the Homeless Initiative Advisory Committee's 5-year plan released earlier this year? Housing units at or below the 30% AMI, as well as transportation improvements, are named as strategies in the 5-year plan. Utilizing this plan, working with our community partners, and moving towards fare-free transit are all ways to support the work of HIAC. This is incredibly important work considering our homelessness numbers are up, and considering the huge impact on veterans living in Asheville.

**What other strategies or initiatives would you consider to address homelessness in our community?** Supporting grassroots efforts being successfully implemented is key! We will have to work with the County and State on increased access to medical and mental health services.

#### ISSUE: Affordable/Workforce Housing

**QUESTION:** What is your position on housing diversity in downtown? I am disappointed that even our affordable housing being built on City owned property isn't affordable for the working people of Asheville since it's aimed at the 60-80% AMI. We must develop housing that includes units in the 30-40% AMI range, working diligently with our community partners. Since property taxes, and therefore rents, are going up in the name of affordable housing, it must include housing that our teachers, musicians, artists, service industry workers, and City employees can afford.

#### **How would you direct staff to utilize funds from the recently passed Affordable Housing Bond?**

We need to be transparent and lean heavily on community input to put use the \$25 million allocated from the Affordable Housing Bond. The investment in our Housing Trust Fund and other programs designed to create affordable and diverse housing must be reflective of the communities that includes workers like teachers, musicians, artists, service industry workers and City employees. Once again, we need to be intentional when prioritizing housing that includes unites in the 30-40% AMI range, while working diligently with our community partners and members, to help guide the City's utilization of funds.

[What other strategies would you like to see our city develop to address the affordability issue? What is your 5-year vision for Downtown?](#) Supporting the Asheville-Buncombe Food Policy Council and our partners working on edible parks will address cost of and access to food. I am thankful for my passionate friends and neighbors working vigilantly to realize a future Asheville that other cities will look to on how to tackle the increasing wage gap, racial disparity, the housing crisis, and affordability while dramatically implementing environmental policy to get ahead of our goals for renewable energy sources.

[Any further comments you'd like to include concerning Downtown Asheville?](#) Downtown Asheville has changed so much during my experience in the past 13 years, having weathered multiple seasons of financial crisis and rapid growth over the decades. I enjoy the unique, local businesses, visiting my friends who live and work Downtown, and attending the festivals and cultural events year-round!