

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 1

Candidate:

Que Chandler

1. What do you see as the top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa? How should those issues be addressed?

One of the biggest issues for the City is the wide gap between the haves and the have-nots. This has worsened because of COVID-19. While there are enclaves of upper-income residents who enjoy high quality schools and benefit from a regularly maintained schedule of City services, there are other areas where there are high concentrations of poverty, extremely poor quality schools, low employment and neighborhood blight, accompanied by high rates of crime. This wide gap in socio-economic conditions is antithetical to a healthy community. I would work to change that. I also believe more should be done in response to COVID-19. I would support forming a public, private, partnerships to help nonprofits, displaced workers, and small businesses.

The City's economic base lacks the diversity to sustain a healthy economy. The City should seek to broaden its economic base by expanding its manufacturing, financial, and knowledge-based industries and services.

Despite having the State's flagship university, one HBCU, and a state-of-the-art community college, Tuscaloosa's public K-12 system remains in the bottom third in the State. I would work to improve educational outcomes for the City's students.

2. Downtown Tuscaloosa has experienced significant growth in recent years, adding hotels, residences, restaurants, and retail. In your view, what needs to be done to build on that momentum?

Because of the COVID pandemic, it's hard to gauge the impact the recent flurry of construction will have on the City. A City's health is not measured solely on construction. A big unanswered question is: to what extent will those residences, hotel rooms, and retail spaces be filled? What the City has to do is to ensure that construction supply does not significantly outpace demand. Now that we have built, let's make sure that there is occupancy. And let's make sure that residents have the spendable income to keep the retailers in business.

3. There is significant community interest in recruiting knowledge-based industries to Tuscaloosa to provide local employment opportunities for the best and brightest graduates of our institutions of higher education. What is your view of how this goal can be achieved?

I am all for knowledge-based industries, but we have to make sure that Tuscaloosa's young people acquire the requisite education to become graduates of our institutions of higher education to get the jobs that these industries create. We need to have "home-grown" knowledge workers.

What I have heard are employers throughout Tuscaloosa saying they cannot find workers with the skills they need, even for entry-level jobs. This "skills gap" represents a massive pool of untapped potential resulting in economic underperformance, social unrest, and individual despair, especially in District 1.

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My priority is to use the resources that are available through workforce development funding to eliminate the skills gap and get unemployed and underemployed residents of District 1 gainfully employed.

4. There is public discussion about a large sports/recreation complex being developed on the former McFarland Mall site. What is your view on this proposed development and should public funds be used to invest in the project?

Has there been a needs assessment or market survey showing that a sports/recreation complex in that location would be utilized? What I do know is that there is a need in West Tuscaloosa for a replacement for the Benjamin Barnes Branch of the YMCA. That facility has served the needs of neighborhood children who walk there for sports and recreation, after-school tutoring, and other activities for over 60 years. For me, any conversation about public funds being spent on a sports and recreation complex begins with the Benjamin Barnes YMCA. The building is dilapidated but still in use by the neighborhood. Until some arrangements are made to provide a suitable facility for use by those West Tuscaloosa children, I would be opposed to expending public funds for any additional sports/recreation facilities.

5. What is your vision for parks and recreation in Tuscaloosa and what role should the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority (PARA) play?

PARA is a critical solution provider for many of the City's top concerns, including preventing youth crime and enhancing the quality of life for all demographic groups. Because it provides facilities and services for a wide range of constituents' needs, it may be the most universally utilized agency in the County. I believe that PARA's role can be expanded to provide actual programming for centers throughout the City (and county).

6. What is your position on Elevate Tuscaloosa? Do you believe Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should remain separated from general funds and used for the types of projects initially discussed, subject to customary review, need, and design requirements?

It bothers me that Elevate Tuscaloosa is financed through increased sales taxes that put a greater burden (proportionately) for its financing on low-income residents, but its benefits are proportionately greater for persons who are not low-income.

Where Elevate Tuscaloosa aligns with public input specifically from District 1 residents, I can support it. Where it does not take into account the sentiments of District 1 residents, I believe it should be revisited.

I participated in multiple Elevate planning sessions and never once heard anyone say "we want to cut funding for the feeding program at McDonald Hughes Center" or "we want a 4 lane highway running through our neighborhood" or "please extend the Riverwalk through West End."

I do believe that Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should be separated from the general fund.

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7. Do you support efforts and city funding to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa? Why or why not?

Yes. District 1 needs more private investment. We should make it easier not harder for folks to get here. Landing in Birmingham etc.. doesn't necessarily help our pitch.

8. The city has multiple budgets, the five largest being the General Fund Operating, General Fund Reserve, Water/Sewer Operating, Water/Sewer Reserve, and Elevate Tuscaloosa. How should each of these be utilized and managed?

I firmly believe that budgets should be utilized in the manner in which they were intended when adopted and managed consistently with their provisions. If changes are needed, the budgets should be amended to reflect the needed changes as soon as practicable.

9. What are the areas of city operations that you think you can bring any special knowledge or expertise? Why are those areas important to you?

My assumption is that these questions relate to Standing Committees since, Council members are generally not involved in day-to-day operations. I believe I could bring special knowledge to the Public Projects, Community Development, and Public Safety committees. All three of these committees have significant influence on shaping any improvements occurring in the district I seek to serve.

10. What is your vision for the City of Tuscaloosa in 10 years? How will you, in your role as an elected official, help make that vision a reality?

My vision for the City of Tuscaloosa is that it will be a destination city with a booming economy, a top-tier public education system, a diverse population where diversity is valued, where significant investments are made in its children and youth, where its residents are civic-minded and engaged in government and where governmental leaders act in the best interest of the residents. If I am an elected leader, I will help to keep other City officials focused on this vision and all decisions I make will be with that vision in mind.

Candidate:

Katherine Waldon

1. What do you see as the top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa? How should those issues be addressed?

- *Public Safety:* Law enforcement is our ally and an asset to the community however, we can do a better job addressing the perception and relationships of law enforcement in our communities. Relationships matter and cultivating the trust between both are vital to the safety of our communities. I will work alongside law enforcement to assure they have the ongoing and consistent training and resources they need to best serve our community and answer calls. I will work to create a neighborhood watch guide and a list of zones, as well as the names of the officers who protect us. I will also Advocate for a citizen accessible database with the following data from our police departments: Use-of-force; Complaints against officers; Compliments for

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officers, Demographics of our police department; and Traffic stops that lead to arrest. Secondly, I will work with our adult and juvenile criminal justice system to advocate for Second Chance initiatives to reduce recidivism. We must re instill hope that you can and will lead a prosperous life and your mistakes don't define you and your future.

- *Economic & Workforce Development:* Tuscaloosa is growing in business and the job pool is growing everyday however, District 1 has not seen much of that growth. It is important that we communicate and utilize programs already in place to provide incentives for business attainment and growth like our opportunity zones. I will work with city planning staff to address land use issues. District 1 is mostly industrial and residential, and we will have to work towards rezoning to have more commercial land available for business. Soft skills training, transportation, and workforce housing are all needs that I will address as well because they are all directly related to workforce development.
- *Connectivity:* Tuscaloosa has amazing resources and service providers in all areas from government agencies to non-profits, for profits, and our faith-based communities. however, we must all come together to maximize our resources and accessibility to the community. It is my desire to advocate for a one stop shop for those seeking work, childcare, utility assistance, financial coaching, healthcare services etc. I will work hard everyday to advocate and seek funds for this needed streamlined process.

2. Downtown Tuscaloosa has experienced significant growth in recent years, adding hotels, residences, restaurants, and retail. In your view, what needs to be done to build on that momentum?

I believe we are moving in the right direction. COVID-19 will have lasting effects on our economy and education system for years to come, but we can be proactive now to ensure the regression is controlled to the best of our abilities. The partnership with the City and the Chamber in providing COVID relief counseling and financial assistance is a prime example of the collaboration needed to "build on the momentum". Continuing campaigns like "buy local" and hosting events that support businesses in Tuscaloosa are vital to our growth.

3. There is significant community interest in recruiting knowledge-based industries to Tuscaloosa to provide local employment opportunities for the best and brightest graduates of our institutions of higher education. What is your view of how this goal can be achieved?

I am excited to see and hear the community's interest and realized value in digital media, software development, life sciences, telecommunications, and more. As a University of Alabama graduate and seeing so many of my peers graduate and have no other choice but to seek a job out of state aligned with their degree is troubling. I believe we combat that with our existing strategies to recruit business. Continuing to highlight the talent pool produced by Stillman College, UA, and Shelton State is important and proving Tuscaloosa is financially and infrastructurally ready for a knowledge-based headquarters is vital.

4. There is public discussion about a large sports/recreation complex being developed on the former McFarland Mall site. What is your view on this proposed development, and should public funds be used to invest in the project?

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I believe that any proposed project should have public input and determined if it meets the need of the community whether it is a sport complex, community resource center, concert hall, etc. My knowledge regarding this development is only what has been communicated to the public and that is limited. My goal is to represent the majority needs of our entire community.

5. What is your vision for parks and recreation in Tuscaloosa and what role should the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority (PARA) play?

As an educator, mother, and co-founder of a summer Saturday enrichment and youth development program, I know that parks and recreation contribute to the mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing of our children. Many times, these opportunities are outlets for our children. An avenue to escape realities that are not favorable. I am excited to see the ongoing studies taking place to revamp and further expand our parks and recreation resources to ensure they are serving every community equally and without fault. I am excited to advocate for a new state of the art Benjamin Barnes YMCA. It is a invaluable safe haven for our children and youth. PARA has been a lifelong partner of the City and with their existing resources I see that partnership growing.

6. What is your position on Elevate Tuscaloosa? Do you believe Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should remain separated from general funds and used for the types of projects initially discussed, subject to customary review, need, and design requirements?

Without Elevate Tuscaloosa, many needed projects would not be moving forward. As an educator, I value education and I believe every single child should have equitable opportunities regardless of race, gender, and economic status. Data supports that Pre-K, Recreational activities, community centers, family oriented outdoor spaces, and Riverwalks contribute to quality of life and growth for youth and residents. The programs and resources Elevate has created deters crime, bolsters education, attracts businesses, and creates jobs. Lastly, Elevate Tuscaloosa funds also made it possible for Tuscaloosa to be eligible for the \$15million BUILD grant regarding match requirements. My priority is the community that elects me and the residents that trust me to serve them. Elevate conducted several community planning and interests meeting and the funded projects were birthed from community feedback.

7. Do you support efforts and city funding to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa? Why or why not?

The data I have reviewed shows that we have an existing air travel population that will take advantage of commercial air service. As our city grows, I see that need growing. As my approach with all projects, it should be vetted by the community and our finance department to ensure the demand and resources are there. If represents the needs of the community, as I believe it has already shown to be, then I will continue to support.

8. The city has multiple budgets, the five largest being the General Fund Operating, General Fund Reserve, Water/Sewer Operating, Water/Sewer Reserve, and Elevate Tuscaloosa. How should each of these be utilized and managed?

Each department should be headed and managed by the staff recruited and hired with the expertise and training to do so and the council members elected to represent the voices of the community. As I have

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stated before community input is essential for any projects and it should be a regular part of the process.

9. What are the areas of city operations that you think you can bring any special knowledge or expertise? Why are those areas important to you?

I believe in being proactive instead of reactive. With the right policies we can make our city safer and better for all. With my education background in Political Science and Public Administration as well as my professional experience in public safety, nonprofit programming, workforce development and education I can contribute new ideas and lasting solutions regarding job development, public safety processes that reduce recidivism and better individuals' chances in living productive lives and continuing the city's support of education and healthcare needs in the community. Poverty is the root of many of our issues. When our communities are full of gainfully employed residents that have the means and resources to provide for our families we grow and prosper together. It is going to take all of our community working tirelessly together to reach our fullest potential. I am excited to use my skillset and the gifts God has given me to move District 1 forward and strengthen Tuscaloosa in whole.

10. What is your vision for the City of Tuscaloosa in 10 years? How will you, in your role as an elected official, help make that vision a reality?

I envision a city that has reached its fullest potential.

- A community with no blight, violence, crime, and drugs
- A community with thriving businesses
- A community that prioritizes relationships with for profit and not for profit business and the faith-based community.
- A community providing everyday needs: Bank, Post Office, Health (General, Dental, and Mental), Grocery Store (with vegan, gluten free, and dairy free options), Restaurants, and Retail.
- A community that expects to be proud of their neighborhood and as such, will reinvest and protect what they LOVE.
- A community that has leadership that values their input.
- A community that holds their representative ACCOUNTABLE to ACT for their good.

Ultimately, I see improved quality of life for all in housing, workforce, education, and health obtained through prioritizing relationships, collaboration, and accessible and transparent leadership.

Candidate:

Matthew Wilson

1. What do you see as the top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa? How should those issues be addressed?

As I reflect on the past few years, I believe that economic and workforce development, housing and Covid-19 relief are the top issues facing Tuscaloosa. 2020 has shown us that a pandemic can exacerbate these issues and highlight how in previous years we have taken a "snail's pace" to address the issues. Similar to the tornado of April 27, 2011, the city has shown its resilience, while opening up the wound of ill-preparedness. We cannot not create a safe, vibrant and thriving city without first addressing the need

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to have a plan. Working with federal and state leaders to develop city-wide mandates (as long as the state of emergency declaration is in place), more testing sites, and vaccine distribution locations, with capable staff to administer the vaccine. Once these measures are in place, we can address the need for more workforce development housing. Workforce development housing ensures that there is a cap on the amount of rent that a rental company can charge residents, ensuring that they are able to work where they live. Residents, who live in the community in which they work, have more of a vested interest in the success and sustainability of that community. The ability to shop at a store or eat at a restaurant in your neighborhood is a value-added amenity. As Tuscaloosa continues to grow, all of the residents need to experience the growth that comes with it. These issues can be addressed by utilizing the mixed-use zoning enhancement developed in the Tuscaloosa Forward plan from nearly 10 years ago.

2. Downtown Tuscaloosa has experienced significant growth in recent years, adding hotels, residences, restaurants, and retail. In your view, what needs to be done to build on that momentum?

It is evident Tuscaloosa is evolving and growing. In order to continue to build on this success, I believe we must continue to develop infrastructure that does not remove the history that is the "Druid City". Expanding the growth of Downtown to other areas in the city could produce a major economic boost for all areas. Having incubators on "main street" corridors in all districts in the city will provide opportunities for folks to live where they work. Developing areas like 15th Street near Piggly Wiggly on the Westside. Redeveloping the Greensboro Avenue/ Skyland area with shops and boutiques. Adding to the progress that has been made in Alberta along the University Blvd corridor. If we can show a simultaneous investment throughout the city, we can build on previous success.

3. There is significant community interest in recruiting knowledge-based industries to Tuscaloosa to provide local employment opportunities for the best and brightest graduates of our institutions of higher education. What is your view of how this goal can be achieved?

The "main street" corridors will provide opportunities for knowledge-based industries to have a minimal investment in the area, until they see the ROI that Tuscaloosa can provide through a steady workforce base and a great community to have a family and raise their children. Capitalizing on the higher education institutions, help to provide off-campus internships and externship through organizations/programs like the Chamber and/ or work-study would help to expose the students to these potential career opportunities. Because industry is constantly changing, the market for larger facilities in the county as a whole is booming.

4. There is public discussion about a large sports/recreation complex being developed on the former McFarland Mall site. What is your view on this proposed development, and should public funds be used to invest in the project?

Public-private partnerships are not a new concept. Some of the most successful and viable projects often have various stakeholders at the table. I believe that there is a need for a sports/ recreation complex. In the past the city has relied heavily on the higher education institutions to provide a space for this to happen. If the city wants to increase the interest in sports and recreation tourism, we must provide a location outside of the local institutions in order to follow NCAA Compliance, as well as be able to host tournaments and events "in season". For example, it's hard to host a regional or state basketball tournament when the colleges are in the middle of basketball seasons. Gymnastics events have been moved to the beach, because it happens the same times as basketball season and needs a gym in order to set up equipment. SEC and NCAA events can be held at neutral sites, like Tuscaloosa if there was a

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venue for it. By venue, I mean a location that could host 5,000-7,000 folks with multi use courts and fields. As far as funding, the city has access to state and local funding that private companies do not, because of that I believe that a partnership to develop this opportunity is needed.

5. What is your vision for parks and recreation in Tuscaloosa and what role should the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority (PARA) play?

PARA has provided so many opportunities for citizens throughout Tuscaloosa County. I believe that there is more that they can do if they were to partner with YMCA and Tuscaloosa City on youth competitive sports. Like offering team competitive opportunities for elementary students and offering support for those athletic programs that middle schools do not offer like swimming, gymnastics, e-sports and archery. I believe that a renewed interest and support in events like Senior Olympics and pickleball will engage those over 60 within the city limits. A continued collaboration with the arts and possibly a facility dedicated to other areas beyond theater, like a community art studio, community "dark room", and pottery shop, would be an added value for our residents. Lastly, I believe that allowing the Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission to help with the marketing and advertising of the facilities and bid opportunities for events.

6. What is your position on Elevate Tuscaloosa? Do you believe Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should remain separated from general funds and used for the types of projects initially discussed, subject to customary review, need, and design requirements?

Elevate Tuscaloosa is a community-driven process for strategically investing in education, cultural arts, tourism, parks, recreation, and connectivity. Furthermore, Elevate Tuscaloosa is about jobs, opportunities, and the future. It's about our children and their ability to have high-quality schools and high-quality education. It's about our children finding jobs here in Tuscaloosa, so they can support their families, raise their families, and maybe even start a business. I believe that it was designed to be a community-driven endeavor but has not taken on that support. Anytime there is an opportunity to move the City of Tuscaloosa forward and benefit its people, I am for it. General funds are customarily utilized to support city services such as police, fire and parks, as well as planning, community development and administrative support services. Elevate Tuscaloosa has a specific mission, and that mission would be best served by keeping the funding separate from the general use fund. We may want to reassess the timeline and offers as the plan progress forward.

7. Do you support efforts and city funding to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa? Why or why not?

For towns and cities with a smaller population, the accessibility and availability of air travel is always one of the line items to considered for cuts when it's time to look at budgets. We need to understand the cost analysis and hear from all stakeholders. The possibility of having a commercial airline carrier is exciting. I support the idea of commercial air service, however, prior to investing in commercial air services, we must first consider the viability of the present small-plane services that we offer and determine if it is feasible to expand our present Level of Services (LOS) to meet the needs of our city, consumers and businesses that rely upon these services. A closer look at the data will have to drive all our decisions and make my support firmer.

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8. The city has multiple budgets, the five largest being the General Fund Operating, General Fund Reserve, Water/Sewer Operating, Water/Sewer Reserve, and Elevate Tuscaloosa. How should each of these be utilized and managed?

As I mentioned prior the General fund covers Finance Function expenses for the city such as fire, police and community development. Proper management and allocation of resources gives the people a sense of confidence in their community leaders. I believe that the current management system is not flawed, but the element of understanding of each budget is not available to the average citizen. When the budget is presented the City Council and true breakdown is not explained to the community as a whole for understanding. This is why I feel each budget should be used for the intent it was designed for—following Budget and Fund Structure set forth, as closely as possible. Allocations of resources and proper management of them give people a sense of confidence in their community leaders. Each of these budgets should be managed the way it is currently set up in order for there to be documentation, when “Peter needs to borrow to pay Paul.” For citizens to make wise and informed choices about their leadership, they need to understand the elements involved in what those leaders govern.

9. What are the areas of city operations that you think you can bring any special knowledge or expertise? Why are those areas important to you?

I have served with consistency in my district as a school board member. It’s no secret that my educational background, tenure as a Board of Education member, and serving on certain committees and panels throughout the city and other areas has awarded me with certain skills and a knowledge base to offer a sound decision in whatever area of city operations as seen fit. With that being said, I have gained insight and knowledge about new constructions, budgets, personnel, policy making and disaster to relief. I believe with these characteristics and others; I can add my insight and knowledge and experience to initiatives surrounding the community as a whole. I am passionate about children and all communities in Tuscaloosa, especially District One. I will use my expertise and influence to ensure that the students and families in my district and beyond have the adequate resources that they need to thrive and safely attend school during this pandemic. For example, when parents If schools aren’t safe, I will work with students, families, staff, teachers and administrators to make sure that our schools are safe for all who enter. It is my love, compassion, and concern for people that fuels my advocacy and commitment in advancing our citizens experiences as homeowners, business owners, and as a member of the community.

10. What is your vision for the City of Tuscaloosa in 10 years? How will you, in your role as an elected official, help make that vision a reality?

My vision is for Tuscaloosa to continue to maximize opportunities for educational and economic growth while retaining a sustainable and safe environment for residents and visitors. I believe that we are one Tuscaloosa and Have the wit and tenacity to become an even greater City. My Vision is for Tuscaloosa to not only be the city of Champions but that of Bridge Builders. We can achieve this through transparent leadership, accountability and continued open line of communication with our constituents. Being a servant leader in this district allows me to collaborate with the Mayor and other council members to set policies and procedures in place for the next generation to come. I strongly believe as a servant leader in my community this opportunity will provide me with the platform to support my vision.

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VISION has a more impactful meaning as I believe I can help the city become better by my leadership. V-Vision will be the opportunity to create a long-term plan for the future by having shared responses from other council members. I-Integrity, I truly believe it is imperative for me to be impactful as a leader in Tuscaloosa by being a man of values and morals taught to me by my parents. S-Service It believe the greatest opportunity to change a generation is by giving of myself, of time, talent, and treasure to make Tuscaloosa a better place for all citizens. Last, A-Accountability, I am voted in by the people of my district and supported by other districts to represent Tuscaloosa by being accountable to them and transparent about city operations as an elected official. I believe by learning the “ins and outs” of the City of Tuscaloosa works, while allowing me to simultaneously work towards better city building the bridge from the past to the present will give me the tools to do the work that has been placed in my hands as Tuscaloosa District One City Councilman Rev. Matthew Wilson.