

## 2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 6

Candidate:

**John Faile**

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

#### 1 Financial Stability

We must begin living within our means. If we keep borrowing money depending on the 1 cent sales tax to cover it we may be in for some hard times. We borrowed \$60 million last year and are discussing more borrowing. We can't go on living beyond our means.

#### 2 Gun violence and Crime in our community

As a city government we must continue to support our police. Equipment and supplies are important, but the officers on the street needs to be confident our city government has their back. Continued training such as the new unit dealing with Mental Health issues is essential as is keeping up with pay to keep our best officers from leaving for greener pastures. There are no simple answers, but we need to work together as a community so we all have a safer place to live.

3 As I have talked with so many voters in my district one thing is clear. They want someone to listen to their issues. They do not expect everything to be solved immediately, they understand that often there are no simple answers. But they do not want to be taken for granted. Many feel that our city government has been unresponsive to the average person. As one resident said, it shouldn't matter what district you live in as to how quick or if you get services. We must earn the trust of people in Tuscaloosa.

### **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?**

We need to make sure that the people using these venues feel safe. Occasional gun violence can not be tolerated. Our police can work with merchants and get their take on what needs to be done to keep this area safe and encourage customers and residents of the downtown area to continue to use all the opportunities in that area. We must insist on keeping the streets clean and attractive. We need to be careful that we don't return to the days of dozens of business front closed down in the downtown district.

### **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 have been a big believer in working with the University of Alabama to solve problems. There are people on campus that can help with strategies for this and other projects. We may not ever compete with Silicon Valley, but we can give opportunities to those in our community. Shelton State Community College has a terrific Technology program and could easily be a participant in this.

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**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?**

The area around exit 73 has been the subject of much debate. While it's easy to see the old Mall site as an eyesore, it's not the only problem. We need to consider the surrounding area. I support the idea of a sports complex and would like to see a hotel with it. I would rather see private funds used but giving those that might invest in the area tax abatements could be a consideration.

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

I believe in PARA and the roll they have played. I have seen it begin in an old school on 15<sup>th</sup> Street and become something very important in our community. I believe we should continue to partner with Tuscaloosa County. We have ignored the needs of Bowers park maintenance for too long and I strongly support keeping the therapy pool at the McAbee center. With help PARA could host even more statewide events that help make Tuscaloosa a destination city.

**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?**

How could anyone not want to elevate Tuscaloosa as a city we can be proud of. So far District 6 has received nothing in return for our part of the tax. I'm glad for the rest of the city but there are needs in our district, that may be a possibility as we go forward. As for mixing the funds into the general fund, if we keep borrowing as we are currently doing we will have to really consider what is essential for our city. If the day comes we can't take care of basic needs we won't have an option but to mix the funds.

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

Having local service would be a good idea. I have some questions about it. First, we know it would be more costly to fly from Tuscaloosa than Birmingham. Would the convenience be worth the cost of a ticket? I think it's worth looking into as I'm sure the University and local businesses might be helped, but we don't need to jump in too quick, especially if it means more spending by our city government to support the flights.

**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?**

We have great department heads in Tuscaloosa. We need to utilize their experience and skills and not micromanage the departments or employees. The council members should work with various department heads to solve problems in their districts.

**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?**

## 2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

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I spent 45 years of my life working in law enforcement. When I retired as a Captain at the Tuscaloosa Police Department, I became the Director of the Tuscaloosa County Juvenile Detention Facility. I worked for a private company contracting with the County Commission for 20 years. Over my life time I have gained a great deal of knowledge concerning Public Safety. I worked closely with the Fire Department Investigating Suspicious Fires. I worked with several Mental Health agencies and Social Workers investigating crimes against children. I know something about keeping our city safe. At the County Juvenile Detention Facility, I learned that private business can often make things happen quicker and more efficiently than government. I will bring all this experience to the Council.

### **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 want to see Tuscaloosa known for more than the University of Alabama. I want this community known as a safe place to visit. A place where people can come for an education but also a place where their families will be safe and have an opportunity to be physically and financially secure. I want our schools to be safe. Without safe, well run schools we will not attract industry. I would like to see our community beautified as it grows and not have pockets of industry or decaying businesses here people are afraid to travel. I care about all of Tuscaloosa. Whatever happens in one part of our community effects all of us. Because I truly care, I will use my experience and judgment to see that Tuscaloosa is a great place to raise a family and live your life.

Candidate:

**Eric Gaines**

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

- Economic development
- Infrastructure
- better maintenance and inspections
- Community safety
- law enforcement and the community working together

### **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 reaching out to a different variety of hotels, restaurants, and other businesses will continue the growth that we have experienced recently.

### **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?**

We have to do a much better job at retaining the graduates from the best university in the world, The University of Alabama.

## 2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 6

**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?**

Great idea, some public funds should be used, but also funds from the developer.

**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 very important. They will play a big part in the reduction of juvenile crime by promoting more city-wide youth activities.

**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?**

The increase in tax from Elevate along with COVID has put an increased financial strain on the elderly with fixed incomes and low class families.

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

Yes, commercial air service goes hand in hand with bringing more business not just to district 6, but all of Tuscaloosa.

**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 plan to be on the finance committee. We will evaluate them all and become a lot more efficient with the taxpayer's dollars.

**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 expertise in finance will be helpful.

**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 a simple 3 step process:

- Initiative/identify the problem
- Collaboration between government, business, and of course the community to come up with answers.
- Action- execute the plan or course of action. Get the job done!

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Candidate:

**Eddie Pugh**

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

COVID is the #1 issue facing our City. A successful vaccine, continuing care for those effected, and continued support for our city businesses large and small.

Public Safety. A fully staffed Police and Fire Department that is kept up to date on the newest technology and training practices.

Infrastructure. The continuing improvements to MLK Blvd., McWright's Ferry Road, Hwy 69 South, Skyland Blvd.

**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?**

Ample parking, a better transit system, improvements to lighting and public safety. Also continuing support to the many small businesses that make up our downtown area.

**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 continued support of our Chamber along with IDA support. Improving the quality of life with the Elevate Program and our City School programs like Pre-K, Summer Learning Program, and College Credits for Seniors.

**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?**

The site of the mall is private property. I do not see any City funds being used at all. The taxpayers of our City should not pay for an individual's improvements to a business or land that we as citizens do not own.

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

Parks and all recreation in our area is vital for the health and wellness of our citizens young and old. I don't believe PARA can continue to provide the services that they offer because of the costs involved and the large area the facilities are located on. We need our governments as a whole working together and sharing costs to move forward.

**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?**

## 2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

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I voted and fully support Elevate Tuscaloosa for the programs it offers. I do believe the funds should remain separate from the General Funds and used only for the projects discussed and their designs.

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

Yes, I do support the future efforts and funding. With Elevate Tuscaloosa there will be funding available for a new terminal, larger runway, and other improvements.

**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?**

The budgets are set up separate for a reason. Better management and maintenance and the ability to be utilized as separate entities.

**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 enjoyed being part of Public Safety and the Administrative committee. I retired from the Tuscaloosa Fire and Rescue after 35 years on the job, starting as a Firefighter and ending my career as a Battalion Chief. I served in most all of the departments that they offer. The Admin Committee allowed me to work on policies within the City and gave me a better understanding of how they operate.

**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?**

A modern City with knowledge-based jobs that have pay scales compatible to being able to raise a family and provide decently for them. A police and fire department that has up to date equipment and training available to all employees. Entertainment like the Riverwalk, Amp, Saban Center to draw families to want to locate in our City. I believe I can help accomplish this by budgeting wisely and working with groups like the Chamber and U of A to move into the future with good and positive ideas.