Questionnaire Answers – Mayor Knox White

1. Over 20 years as mayor with a commitment to making Greenville the most beautiful and livable city in America. Supported by Henry Horowitz, Minor Shaw, Mary Duckett, Bob Howard, DJ Rama, Craig Brown and scores of others who are community leaders in economic and neighborhood development as well as the arts and other key parts of our quality of life.

2. Growth is our challenge- which is a good place to be. Housing affordability and public transportation have been much of the city’s focus. After decades of population decline, the city is now growing, inspired by Falls Park and the success of the many downtown projects that have come to define our city. A Housing Trust Fund and the 60 acre Unity Park to be ringed by affordable housing is the linchpin of our new effort to manage growth and assure new opportunities for affordable housing. Enhanced investment in our bus system and a closer partnership with the county in support of transportation is another step in the right direction. The city is also pursuing its own creative ways to address traffic. The soon-to-open Parallel Parkway to relieve traffic on Woodruff Road is an example.

3. Recruiting new corporate headquarters to the city will be an emphasis in the coming year. Several good prospects are already in the pipeline. My hope is that we have a genuine recruiter back on board in the coming year.

4. Yes. Our community’s premiere conference space needs to be downtown where the hotels and restaurants are. Our proposed site on the river is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get it right. A new center should align its recruitment focus with the city/county economic goals, bringing to our city those conferences and people who we want to see locate businesses here. That’s a very different mission from that of the existing convention center. This is also a wonderful opportunity for city/council collaboration. The city has ample hospitality tax reserves to fund its portion of the project.

5. All are indicators of growth and our success in attracting people and businesses to Gville. Our job is to recognize all of these concerns and be pro-active. Anyone who actually visits downtown on weekends can see ample evidence that our city is welcoming to all. There is simply no place in Greenville County where the diversity is more apparent and real than on Main Street. The parks and river front and Main Street have something for everyone. Our bigger challenge is to assure a diversity of affordable residential neighborhoods, which is our focus. As to traffic, the wider county population growth (still dwarfing that of the city) brings new traffic congestion to the city. We are actively working on creative new ways to help relieve congestion during the short 5 pm traffic rush.

6. Yes. And it’s really a county-wide issue, too. The city has taken the lead in making investment in affordable housing. Unity Park will be a model for addressing senior housing, low rental housing, and work force housing in an area that has seen little new housing of any type over the past 30 years. In the park and elsewhere we are looking for ways to make it easier to develop duplexes and other forms of multi-family. While we are respectful of preserving the character of all neighborhoods, we want to encourage opportunities for in fill. It’s a delicate balancing act, but we have many successful examples of how to do it with community support.

7. That’s our principal mission. With good planning and through PP partnerships we can continue to balance our growth with a commitment to quality of life. More parks and green space, bike walking trails and sidewalk construction are a big part of the mix. People across the county are looking for communities that are walkable and livable as places to retire or open new businesses. That will continue to be our differentiator- an emphasis on planning, quality of life amenities and giving a genuine voice to residents through our neighborhood associations.
8. Collaboration is always key. Chamber support for public transportation has been much appreciated and effective, but there is more to do. Work force development and support for new tech businesses through NEXT are two key partnerships that will receive even more attention from the city.

9. The city has always invested heavily in infrastructure. Sewer capacity issues downtown have been creatively and aggressively addressed. We are working more closely than ever with state DOT to address road issues. Putting a local option sales tax back on the ballot in the county should be a priority in 2020.

10. Those are communities with sales tax support for public transportation. The city supports such a tax with referendum, but only the county can put it on the ballot. In the meantime the city has led the way in increasing its general fund contributions to Greenlink and in finding new funding for its facilities and new Proterra electric buses (the city is the sole match for the Proterra buses). I’ve been deeply engaged in all of these successful efforts.

11. We are working to make sure this project is a seamless part of our downtown. That means compliance with our design guidelines, a walkable, people-focused environment and room in the project for affordable housing.

12. We always support more standardization and ease of compliance. Property taxes and business license revenues fund the core of our city’s services, especially for public safety (police and fire). Even as we take on new responsibilities in areas such as affordable housing and transportation we continue to maintain a AAA bond rating (the ONLY city in SC with such a rating from all rating agencies!) and we keep taxes low compared to peer cities.