2019 Greenville City Council Questionnaire

1. Describe your qualifications for office and identify up to five organizations or individuals who are actively supporting your candidacy and why their support is important.

I am running for Greenville City Council District 1 to improve and protect our neighborhoods, enhance our parks and natural resources, and support our community centers through thoughtful, strong representation and leadership at City Hall. I was raised in Greenville and returned to begin my legal career and start a family after graduating from Rhodes College and the University of Memphis’ Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law, during which time I clerked for the Honorable D’Army Bailey of the Shelby County Circuit Court.

Since my return to Greenville I have been engaged in the practice of law. I have been with Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart, PC, since 2004 and represent employers in all aspects of employment and labor law before state and federal agencies and in state and federal courts. I regularly counsel clients on issues pertaining to multistate leave compliance, including drafting and review of various leave of absence policies related to various state and local laws. In addition, I provide counsel and advice on a variety of employment and labor law matters.

Prior to Ogletree Deakins, I worked in a general litigation and insurance defense practice where I was involved in civil litigation and trial practice, including construction and commercial litigation as well as railroad and transportation, product liability, and premises liability matters.

I completed the Chamber’s Opportunity Greenville program and am a Leadership Greenville Class 34 alumnus. After Leadership Greenville I sought out opportunities to become more involved in the City and was fortunate to be appointed to the City of Greenville Planning Commission, which makes recommendations to City Council on zoning and annexation issues, reviews and approves new subdivisions, and is involved in comprehensive planning to improve the health and welfare of the public. During this time I served as Planning Commission Chair and on the City’s Residential Infill Task Force, which analyzed and made recommendations to City Council about infill projects, their impact on existing neighborhoods, and related ordinances.

In addition to my work in the public and private sectors, I have remained dedicated to bettering the Greenville community through volunteer work. Currently, I am a Steering Committee Member with the Greenville Homeless Alliance, where I work to combat local homelessness and increase housing options for at-risk families and individuals.

My support comes from my Greenville friends and family, my neighborhood, and local businesses. Their support is important because they, in addition to my family, are the reason I am running for City Council District 1.

2. What are the greatest challenges facing the City of Greenville and what will you do as a Council Member to address them?
**Affordable Housing**—The Greenville Housing Fund, a 501(c)(3) organization designed to advocate for and invest in affordable housing must be given greater support for us to solve our affordable housing problem. Based on my experience as Chair of the City of Greenville Planning Commission, our zoning ordinance and processes do not provide sufficient certainty to developers or neighborhoods. Developers want and deserve certainty in the process to ensure they can plan for success. At the same time, neighborhoods deserve to know that new development will be consistent with current uses and protect their neighborhood and investment. Improved ordinances that focus on incentivized inclusionary zoning, with incentives for developers to build affordable housing can address this issue. Incentives can include modifying planning standards based on performance criteria, bonus systems that allow for altered height, density, setback, or parking requirement to encourage affordability, and fast-tracked planning approvals. In this context, all of these additional solutions (ADUs, increased density, and transit-oriented development) are proven solutions that should be considered.

**Public Transportation**—Greenville’s investment in public transportation has not been sufficient to meet current needs or increased future needs and growing traffic congestion. Although our investment has increased, we still lag behind comparable cities. As our growth outpaces these cities, our lack of transportation infrastructure will become more pronounced. Greenville must continue to invest in Greenlink to increase ridership, frequency, and efficiency, as well as explore a more diverse transit system, to support more Greenville residents, reduce traffic congestion, and reduce environmental impact.

**Support for Parks and Community Centers**—Our parks and community centers are essential to Greenville’s vibrancy. Indeed, we need more park space to support our growing population. As such, I support the new Unity Park, and will fight to ensure Greenville does everything possible to see it to completion, while offsetting increases in rental costs and development that would otherwise displace nearby citizens. Further, I will refocus City Hall on existing parks and essential community centers. I made the decision to run for District 1 to fight for the Bobby Pearse Community Center, which was demolished by a falling tree over a year ago, yet it has not been repaired, replaced, or improved. I will support our community centers and the essential services they provide, both in District 1 and other deserving communities.

3. What do you believe is the most pressing issue facing office and employment growth in Greenville? What would you do about it as a Council member and what experience do you have dealing with such issues?

While Greenville’s residential housing, hotels, and hospitality industry have thrived, we have seen suboptimal office/commercial occupancy. Greenville needs more downtown businesses to maintain balance. In part, solving housing affordability and transportation (and parking) issues, which I’ve addressed above, will make downtown more desirable to business owners and employees.
4. The plans for a downtown conference or convention center have created much discussion amongst city residents. Do you support the project (or not), and what will you do to ensure it is completed (or scuttled)?

I support a downtown conference/convention center that will attract businesses and start-ups to downtown Greenville, thereby improving providing jobs and reducing office/commercial occupancy. I will use my knowledge of Greenville’s planning and design processes to ensure the proposed center will be appropriate for its purpose, includes needed public space, supports nearby business and residences, minimizes environmental impact, and is designed for the long-term.

5. In June, the czb consultants working on the GVL2040 comprehensive plan released five “hunches” based on their preliminary research. Please respond to these selected assessments with your assessment of the state of the City.

   a. “The gut feeling amongst Greenville residents may be that the city will, at some point, cease to be a place for middle- and working-class people.”

      Given rising housing costs and current public transportation infrastructure, this is a legitimate concern. We need to address these issues now, as well as continue to create jobs at all levels, to ensure these concerns are addressed.

   b. “The gut feeling amongst Greenville residents may be that the weekday commuting traffic has become unbearable.”

      Traffic congestion has become more pronounced in recent years. My morning travel time from school drop off to the office has demonstrably increased. A focus on smart traffic engineering can help, but alternative means of transportation and increased public transportation will be critical to our future success.

   c. “The gut feeling amongst Greenville residents may be that the city will soon be a place where only high-earning households can afford to live.”

      As stated above, this is likely the case if we do not address rising housing costs and our current public transportation infrastructure.

   d. “The gut feeling amongst Greenville residents may be that the city has become a playground of sorts for young white people and that the very idea of an African-American community may now be in question.”

      In listening to African-Americans in Greenville, I agree there is fear that development and rising housing costs will have this effect. Greenville’s leaders must listen to and acknowledge these concerns. More importantly, we must act to protect historically African-American neighborhoods, which is not incompatible with strong economic growth
and development. Indeed, if we are to have a city where businesses and people prosper, it is essential.

6. The Greenville Chamber supports efforts to increase the availability of housing for our workforce. What can the City do to support these efforts? Do you support policies to support accessory dwelling units, more density, transit-oriented development, and other solutions? Please elaborate.

While service as Chair of the City's Planning Commission, I became concerned our zoning ordinance and processes did not provide sufficient certainty to either developers or neighborhoods. Developers want and deserve certainty in the process to ensure they can plan for success. At the same time, neighborhoods deserve to know that new development will be consistent with current uses and protect their investment. Improved ordinances that focus on incentivized inclusionary zoning, with incentives developers to build affordable housing can address this issue. Incentives can include modifying planning standards based on performance criteria, bonus systems that allow for altered height, density, setback, or parking requirement to encourage affordability, and fast-tracked planning approvals. In this context, all of these additional solutions (ADUs, increased density, and transit-oriented development) are proven solutions that should be considered.

7. The City of Greenville and Greenville County are growing rapidly. Some of our new neighbors are retirees, but most come here to take jobs because of our success in economic development. As we create jobs, demand for housing increases. How will you balance the desire to preserve our city's character, continue economic development, and protect our city-center neighborhoods while balancing the need to provide decent, affordable housing to our city's residents?

Protecting neighborhoods and ensuring affordable housing for all Greenville residents, regardless of race, income, or other factors, is a key aspect of my decision to run for City Council. Greenville can update and improve its zoning and planning ordinances to incentivize developers and builders to build housing appropriate for all economic levels. Given my experience on the Planning Commission and as an attorney, I am confident we can take this steps and improve the process for all involved.

8. The Greenville Chamber and the City of Greenville have partnered for decades to face and tackle issues important to Greenville. Where do you see important areas on which to collaborate between the City and the business community? What experience do you have to ensure successful collaboration in these areas?

Much of Greenville’s current success is due to the partnership of private businesses and investors with local government. As an attorney who has represented both local business and the City, and as a member and Chair of the City of Greenville Planning Commission, I have significant insight into the local business community and the City’s governing ordinances and internal operations that will allow me to continue to bridge these two groups.
9. Because of our rapid growth, the city’s infrastructure is being tested as never before. What will you do as a City Council member to address items such as road and sewer infrastructure, and what experience do you have to address this issue?

Maintaining our roads and sewer infrastructure will be critical to our future success. Greenville has successfully used tax increment financing options for development and should continue to do so for infrastructure projects in key areas as this will foster further collaboration between the private and public sectors.

10. Greenville’s investment in transit is significantly lower than our peer communities. (Greenville spends $3.80 per capita, Birmingham spends about $46 per capita and Columbia spends about $56 per capita.) Do you support increased funding and investment in Greenlink? If so, what would you do to address funding for Greenlink and collaboration with the County. Please outline the experience you have to help this effort.

Greenville must increase funding of Greenlink and oversee related spending to ensure it is used efficiently. Traffic congestion in Greenville has worsened noticeably in recent years and forecasts suggest Greenville will continue to add residents in years to come. Further worsening of traffic congestion and parking woes is unacceptable. Additional funding for Greenlink can be offset by increased ridership. We have taken steps in that direction with increased funding, more efficient routes, and improved hours of service, but more is required.

11. A major issue over the next decade will be the redevelopment of the 37 acres at County Square. The Chamber believes this is a transformative economic development project for both Greenville County and the City of Greenville. How will you work with the County to ensure completion of this project?

I agree that County Square is in need of redevelopment. However, with associated costs increasing and uncertainty as to how governmental services provided at County Square will continue, I am concerned the current plan will have unwanted short-term and long-term consequences. However, I agree that the County should continue to pursue redevelopment in a fiscally responsible and transparent manner.

12. The issue of business license fees is a recurring battle in Columbia that pits the local business community against the City of Greenville. Are you open to streamlining and standardizing the process, and will you be open to compromise with the business community to find a solution that will be acceptable to both business and the City?

I agree that the business license fee process should be streamlined and standardized. The City and businesses should work toward a process that provides reasonable certainty and timeliness to businesses as well as allowing the City to perform necessary oversight functions.