

Voices to Votes NC Questionnaire: Jonathan Barfield, Jr.

1. If elected as Mayor, which factor will carry more weight in your decision-making: your professional experience and personal opinions or the wishes of a majority of Wilmington residents?

I think to make a sound decision, it takes a combination of all that you mentioned in your question. Without a doubt, listening to your constituents is critical and key to delivering services and outcomes that those you represent want. Someone who has served in elected office before will have a greater knowledge base than someone who hasn't as it relates to meeting the needs of the overall community and past decisions that may directly impact the current decision at hand. In serving as a county commissioner for 16 years, I believe I blended all into my decision-making process. Unless you decide every decision by referendum, you will never know in reality what the majority of citizens want, you'll only know what the majority of those who contact you want.

2. As a county commissioner, you voted for many multi-family residential developments that had negative impacts on greenspace, traffic congestion and safety and aesthetics of the community. Do you believe increased density and population has any negative impact on the quality of life for existing Wilmington residents?

Increased density is only one solution to our housing dilemma. With a projection of being over 25,000 housing units needed to accommodate for the anticipated growth in New Hanover County, I believe its going to take a regional approach partnering with neighboring counties to shoulder the load so to speak. Having been raised in Wilmington I have appreciated the diversity of people that have moved here that have helped shape a more diverse and accepting community. A big part of our traffic congestion comes from the thousands that come into our county daily for work, shopping, medical care, the list goes on. We are the regional hub for southeastern North Carolina.

3. Do you believe existing Wilmington residents should be willing to sacrifice some level of their quality of life to create more housing for people who want to move to Wilmington?

Having been raised here, I do not know how we would have a mechanism in place to stop people from moving into our county. I believe that people who own land have a right to develop that land as long as it doesn't harm their neighbors. There are many by right zoning areas where, according to existing zoning a person can do certain things to their property without a rezoning. The overall goal of zoning is to create nodes so that you have a cluster of services where people

don't need to travel long distances to go to the doctor, grocery store, pharmacy, etc. Overall, I believe our community is seeing the benefits of that kind of planning. I live at 17th and College. And I'm within walking distance of two pharmacies and three grocery stores.

4. What is the “right size” for Wilmington as it relates to population? Estimates have 30,000 + people moving to our city over the next 15 years. As a council member, would you support building more multi-family housing to accommodate this growth? Would you support concurrency ordinances in our building codes to require new infrastructure to be in place prior to approval of new development projects?

As long as it follows the law I believe working within the construct of an adequate public facilities zoning plan would allow for orderly growth, but as I mentioned earlier I believe the best solution would be partnering with neighboring counties to lessen the development burden on New Hanover County and the City of Wilmington. We can't shoulder this burden alone. Brunswick County is said to be the fastest growing county in the state and they have plenty of land to accommodate the growth expected for our area. We in my opinion do not have enough available land in our county to accommodate the growth anticipated over the next 30 years.

5. The problem of our unhoused population has generated lots of discussion in recent weeks, especially relating to downtown. Do you think the existing city ordinances relating to public camping, trespassing, littering and other related issues should be strictly enforced via citations and arrests? If no, please suggest specific measures you feel the city should take to ensure businesses and downtown visitors can enjoy a clean and safe environment. Most people agree a jail cell is not a long-term solution so what should be the city's role to help the unhoused to get off the street and not return?

As a County Commissioner, I voted against the county's initial ordinance that would have criminalized being homeless. I supported the county's efforts to provide social workers in the downtown area to connect our unhoused neighbors with needed services etc. I believe increased funding to the agencies working in this space will help increase their capacity to serve our unhoused neighbors. I was disappointed that New Hanover County chose to abandon these efforts. As a County Commissioner, I supported funding for the Good Shepherd, Eden Village, First Fruit Ministries and a host of day shelters. New Hanover County and the City of Wilmington convened a joint meeting and invited over 25 direct service providers to the table and asked for their input. Now it's time to listen and implement their best practices.

6. You have suggested increasing taxes may be necessary if we are committed to a stronger police force, safer streets, more support for the homeless and other issues requiring investment. What amount of tax increase would you support and what would be the top priorities to receive the additional funding?

That really depends on what the current projected budget will be and what the city's priorities are. I often say that if you show me your check book register, I can show you where your heart is. We spend based on what our priorities are. If you say that supporting public safety, our unhoused neighbors and other issues, then you should adequately fund these initiatives to allow them to achieve your anticipated goal. What I do know is that many first responders feel that they are underpaid, and as a community, we could do more in investing in those agencies that support our unhoused neighbors.