

People's Alliance PAC 2008 Questionnaire

for Durham Board of County Commissioners Candidates

Candidate's Name: Brenda Howerton

Thanks for the chance to meet with you. I want PA's endorsement and any help that members can give me with my campaign. I know I don't have all the answers and that's one of the reasons I want to work with PA—I value your ideas and suggestions. I'm a candidate that is short on rhetoric, but I'm long on getting results. I'd like to work with PA to have a county government that works to make sure every citizen has a better life. Brenda

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1. Do you think that the County Government has exhibited an adequate response to the drought and water crisis? If not, what else could be done and how would it be paid for?

County government has a limited role in supplying water. They own one facility, called the Triangle wastewater treatment plant that serves RTP and surrounding areas. The county should explore selling treated wastewater as irrigation to RTP, but laying pipe for that might cost millions. The amount may be big enough that it would have to be paid for by borrowing the money on the bond market and then the bonds could be paid off with revenue from selling the treated wastewater for irrigation to nearby RTP companies, instead of charging citizens.

The county commission should also work with the city to require that new developments have water efficient appliances –toilets, washers, etc.

Interestingly, if homes use less water, it would reduce the amount of wastewater and reduce the amount of money the county would get from the water bills (that the city manages for the county since they are also billing the same customers for the drinking water) So... wastewater rates may have to go up, since those costs are mostly fixed.

2. Are you aware that the Department of Homeland Security has chosen Durham/Granville counties as one of five possible sites for a facility to study dangerous and poorly known viruses and diseases? Do you support the location of this facility in our community? When economic development and public health and well-being are in a potential conflict, where does the burden of proof lie?

I'm aware of that. I don't support it. Public health is more important than economic development, because if you sell out your public health, you probably can't afford to buy it back. The burden of proof rest with the elected officials. Pushing the staff, making certain that we get to the right answer, making sure we do we are accountable to the citizens

3. The Durham City and County governments' Measuring our Progress report of 2005 focused on 8 measurements. For each, please state Durham County's biggest current challenge—and the single first thing you would try to do as a Commissioner to solve that challenge. One short sentence for each challenge, please! This is an overview question. State the challenge briefly, and briefly state your first method of approaching that challenge.

§ Children are ready for and succeeding in school

More kids in quality pre-schools: Finding money for more subsidized slots for kids.

§ Durham citizens enjoy a healthy environment

Cutting greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles to reduce global warming and problems like asthma: Switching County vehicles to hybrids.

§ Durham's citizens enjoy a community that is vibrant, rich in aesthetic beauty and embraces and promotes its cultural heritage

We need a Durham History Museum that teaches us about our past so that we don't repeat those mistakes (racism, classism, greed, etc.): Securing a piece of land or part of a building for the museum.

§ Every citizen in Durham has access to adequate, safe and affordable housing

Not enough homeownership in Durham: require inclusionary zoning from developers.

§ Durham enjoys a prosperous economy

We've had 12-15% poverty rate for decades: we need more vocational job training for dropouts, released felons, teen moms, etc.

§ Durham citizens are healthy

Not enough citizens with health insurance: put Project Access in place and build it up.

§ All Durham citizens are safe

The cops/deputies do a reasonable job of arresting criminals, but the criminal justice system is slow to try them and the jail/prisons don't rehabilitate them: get the General Assembly to put more money into the courts (more DA's etc.) and more incentives and opportunities for rehab/job training in jail/prison.

§ Durham citizens enjoy sustainable thriving neighborhoods with efficient and well-maintained infrastructure

Our paved and unpaved streets in town look like heck and too many areas don't have sidewalks or greenways: But infrastructure is a city function, so if PA has ideas for the county to help with this, I'm all ears.

4. Does the above imply that these statements do not apply to residents who are not citizens (i.e. non-citizen immigrants)? What challenges does the County face with regard to these immigrants/residents, and what policies are needed?

When the PA letter says: "Thanks again for offering yourself in service to the citizens of Durham." does that imply that PA is not referring to non-citizen residents? I don't think it's helpful to assume that the use of the term citizen might be a code word for excluding undocumented immigrants and I don't think the county commissioners or county staff generally have shown any inclination to exclude anyone through the RBA process or otherwise. If that's not the case, please let me know.

The most apparent challenge is language/communication and making sure that county and school staff have enough bilingual personnel and that there is enough ESL funding for everyone that

wants to learn English.

The next challenge is making sure that people aren't afraid to call 911 for fear of being deported, so we can't have the sheriff's department enforcing federal immigration laws.

A third challenge is keeping immigrant children in school, so they can find good jobs. So we need to make sure the schools have the resources to continue their anti-dropout programs. We need to be inclusive.

5. How do you think that the City and County can work together better? Would you support some form of City - County government consolidation? If not, why not? If so, what are the obstacles to it and how should they be mitigated or overcome?

Compared to 20 years ago, before planning and inspections dept.'s were merged, I think they are working together reasonably well. I'm not aware of a big problem on that front, but I would welcome PA's thoughts on that. Even if there are small problems in city-county coordination, they are worth working on.

If merger could be done in a way that simplifies things for citizens and saves money in the long run it could be worthwhile. But at this point it may be harder than it's worth because of the political resistance in the black community to merging police and sheriff's departments. There is also the complicating issue with city limits of Raleigh and Chapel Hill running over the county line and Durham city annexations that run over the county lines in the other direction. Perhaps those things could be dealt with, so merger might be a nice idea, but it is not a priority for me given all the other issues on our plate: poverty, teen pregnancies/STD's, crime,

mental health reform, school overcrowding, etc. One only has so much political capital to spend.

6. What part can the county play in providing a safety net for the most profoundly mentally ill persons, given the difficulties with state privatization?

The state's mental health "reform" has made a mess of everything. I would like to see the county play a more aggressive role in dealing with mental health. So many of the people engaging in crime, drug abuse, domestic violence, underage sex, etc. are probably suffering from some degree of depression or other mental/emotional illness. Locking them up is more expensive than preventive treatment.

7. In order to raise much-needed revenue for capital needs and operating funds, do you favor enacting a land transfer tax? An increase in the sales tax? Both? Would you support placing these on the ballot for county voters this fall or in 2009?

No to the sales tax. As a flat rate tax, it disproportionately hurts the poor and middle class. Raising the same amount of money with a property tax increase, would cost households less than a sales tax increase, since businesses would be chipping in with the property tax increase.

Developers and new residents would be paying the land transfer tax, somewhat like an impact fee. It's too small an amount to affect whether a property sells or not. And raising the same amount of money with a sales tax would cost the average person more—same as the property tax vs. sales tax example above; a sales tax just takes businesses off the hook—they buy things wholesale and don't

pay very little sales tax themselves. The land transfer tax has failed everywhere it's been voted on due to a mis-education campaign by the real estate industry. There is no sense in having a referendum here until Durham citizens get educated about the land transfer tax.

8. Do you support increased mass transit? If so, in what form and how would you propose funding it? If not, why not?

Until we get a rail line linking the Triangle Durham needs buses that run more frequently than every hour or half-hour. So yes I support more public transit. Funding for transit should come from property tax not sales tax as in Charlotte, because that would put most of the burden on middle class and poor households. How will poor households get ahead if government pulls more money out of their pockets? Especially if they're pulling a disproportionate amount? That wouldn't make sense to me.

9. The County has provided economic incentives to lure new companies and new jobs to the area. Do you support the current County strategy? Do you have suggestions to enhance this strategy, or would you restrict/reduce it? Do you support the County providing incentives to Greenfire and Scientific Properties for their current proposals? If so, should the County provide similar incentives in the future? Should the County impose certain requirements, e.g., require the creation and maintenance of a certain number of jobs? If so, why, and if not, why not?

Generally, I support the strategy. I would improve it by requiring that the businesses pay a living wage that is tied to inflation and that the same policy applies to the employees of their contractors. I also think these businesses could make a good faith effort, as CAN

has suggested, to hire Durham citizens.

I'm not up on all the details of the Greenfire and Scientific Properties proposals, but they seem to be good for Durham and I don't see a reason to oppose them.

Until all governments are banned from using incentives to bribe companies move in—rather than competing just on quality of life, good environment, good schools, good workers, etc.—we shouldn't opt out. There is always room for improvement with the incentives and since we are a very attractive place already, we shouldn't sell ourselves short and be afraid to ask for more from these businesses in the way of wages, benefits, number of jobs and other commitments to Durham.

10. What is the primary issue facing Durham County in its land use policies? How would you address this issue?

Sprawl—denser development, inclusionary zoning and more transit will reduce sprawl. I would advocate for more funding for transit, an inclusionary zoning ordinance and incentives for developer to build dense, transit-oriented developments.

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