



**Chapel Hill - Carrboro NAACP**  
**2019 Council/Alderman Candidate Questionnaire**

*Please type out your responses in full below; take as much space as you need to answer the question in full. We thank you in advance for your participation.*

Full Name:	Susan Steffensen Romaine
Age/Race/Gender (with preferred pronouns):	Age 59, White, She/Her
Occupation>Title/Retired:	Director of two non-profit organizations, PORCH and Orange County Living Wage
Position sought:	Seat on the Carrboro Board of Aldermen

Headshot Photograph  
(published with your  
questionnaire responses):



## Background

1. **Please provide an overview of your local civic leadership/organizational affiliations. What specific insights into our local community have you garnered from this service work?** In 2004, our family moved to Lake Hogan Farms, and I was actively engaged in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, from which all three of our kids graduated. In 2006, I was selected as chair of Orange County Democratic Party's Hogan Farms Precinct, a position that I just stepped down from to run for Carrboro Board of Aldermen. In 2010, two friends and I founded the local hunger relief initiative, PORCH, of which I continue to serve as director. In 2015, friends and I founded Orange County Living Wage, of which I continue to serve as director. Through my civic engagement, I have learned that change comes slowly; and change is most impactful when it is collaborative in nature, through outreach to the impacted stakeholders in the community.
  
2. **What has motivated you to run for the office you seek?** I am a collaborator. I work from the middle, where compromise and progress are often made. I feel that this role is especially needed on our current Board that can be quite polarized around certain issues such as Bolin Creek Forest, the availability of parking in downtown, and the scale of development in Carrboro as well as the northern transition area. I also believe that the Board is heavily dominated by downtown representation, and there should be a stronger voice from the northern neighborhoods, where I live. Among the seven Board members, only one – Mayor Lydia Lavelle – lives in the northern neighborhoods. What's more, a resident of Lake Hogan Farms has never served on the Board, despite the fact that we represent a sizeable portion of the Town's population and revenue base. As precinct chair for Hogan Farms for the past 13 years, I would be honored to be the first Lake

Hogan Farms resident elected to the Board and excited to bring more of my neighbors' concerns to the decision-making process.

3. **Have you attended the Racial Equity Institute (REI) training or any other racial equity trainings in the past three years?** (Note: This training is not the same as diversity or cultural competence training.) NO, I have only attended a diversity training.
  - **If you have, what was the most impactful aspect of the experience?** N/A
  - **If you have not, if elected, do you commit to register and attend this type of training?** YES
  - **Describe instances or situations in which you have applied racial equity frameworks in your work.** Over the past year, PORCH Board members (including myself) attended a series of workshops hosted by Executive Service Corps that included racial equity discussions. These discussions fueled our motivation to much more aggressively bring racial and socioeconomic balance to our Board, so that our Board more accurately reflects the demographics of the families that we serve. This process began with the recruitment of Gabe Treves-Kagan of the Latino Community Credit Union to our Board. We are now in discussions with Coretta Sharpless, Principal of Northside Elementary. We would also like to bring on board a member of one of the 150-plus refugee families from Burma that we serve. With a more diverse Board, I believe PORCH can take some important steps in assessing the racism that exists within our organization (and amongst our volunteers), setting realistic goals for addressing the problem, and then evaluating our success in meeting our goals.

### **Housing Affordability and Local Taxation**

4. **What strategies do you support for increasing the supply of affordable housing in Chapel Hill/Carrboro?** First and foremost, Carrboro has an Affordable Housing Fund, with a current balance of \$350,000, to apply toward the construction, repair, and renovation of affordable housing – for both renters and homeowners alike. In addition, the Board has an important role to play in negotiations with developers. Where there are homeowners, a developer can be *required* to set aside a certain number of units as affordable (as was done in my neighborhood, Lake Hogan Farms). For rentals, a developer can be *incentivized* to set aside a certain number of affordable units through density bonuses, as was done in Shelton Station. The Board must continue to assess need for affordable housing and match this up with expectations during future negotiations with local developers.
5. **Do you have specific ideas on how to make affordable housing, both rental and owned (and especially housing accessible to transit) available to people who work and provide essential services in our town?** To help folks transition out of homelessness, I would like to see Carrboro partner with a housing organization and faith-based organization to build tiny homes or Pee Wee homes, similar to the three at Church of the Advocate. For the “missing middle,” I would like to see the Town build more duplexes and triplexes, cottages, and bungalows. As discussed in Question #7, I would also like to see the Town build more senior housing, enabling more residents to age in place. But homeownership is only part of the housing equation. With each new home requiring as much as a \$120,000 public/private subsidy, anywhere from 25 – 40 residents could be placed in apartment rentals, depending on their income. I would like to see Carrboro pilot a master leasing program, similar to the one that Chapel Hill is doing in Glen Lennox, to offer more rental opportunities for working families in the community. Lloyd Farm, the Greene Tract, and the northern transition area can all be considered as possible sites for much-needed affordable housing.

- 6. How can we better engage residents of public housing in municipal governance?** It is critically important that residents of public housing are engaged in municipal governance. I would encourage these residents to serve on any of Carrboro's 18 Boards and Commissions (with free day care provided at meetings) and better yet, run for local office. But to hear their voices, we can't always assume that residents of public housing will come to the Board of Aldermen; the Board must also come to these residents. On any given night, there are so many obstacles that get in the way of well-meaning residents participating in municipal governance (i.e., working the evening shift, a language or transportation barrier, helping a child or other family member, overwhelming financial stress or other mental health issues, fatigue, etc.) So if we truly believe in a local government that hears from a representative slice of its populace, we must make accommodations, as needed.
- 7. What initiatives or changes in existing policy would you support to make it possible for seniors to “age in place”? How can the town support more affordable assisted-living options?** The residential component of the future Lloyd Farms development includes some much-needed housing for the 55 & over population. The proposed Zinn project in the northern transition area may include a two-story commercial building with an assisted living center. But even with this, there will be a shortage of options for seniors to “age in place” – something the Town of Carrboro must keep on its radar for future developments.
- 8. In what ways would you like to see our town's tax base diversified? How should we move towards that?** Only 10% of our Town's property tax revenues come from the commercial side; the other 90% falls on residents. This ratio is simply unsustainable. The Town must broaden its commercial tax base by accelerating the development of Lloyd Farm (now in its fifth year with no groundbreaking in sight); and through thoughtful, environmentally sensitive development in the northern transition area. I would also like to see Carrboro launch an incubator, much like Chapel Hill's LAUNCH, offering shared space and mentoring for small start-ups that grow into larger revenue-generating, home-grown enterprises.
- 9. How should the town address future possible displacement of residents of mobile home parks?** The Greene Tract is an ideal location for residents who have been displaced from mobile home parks. Owned by Orange County, Town of Chapel Hill, and Town of Carrboro, the Greene Tract is the largest undeveloped public parcel remaining in the county, offering ideal opportunities for affordable housing (the land is free) and environmental preservation (connecting and expanding trails and recreation in the forest to other parks, preserves, and greenways). I would love to lend my voice to discussions among the three municipalities in determining just the right balance in the affordable housing-environmental preservation split.
- 10. What is your position on the Rosemary Street Vision and its impact on the Northside neighborhood?** N/A
- 11. How can the town address the pressures of rising regional population growth, increased student population, and rising land prices in ways that do not disproportionately negatively impact communities of color and low-income neighborhoods?** The Marian Cheek Jackson Center's land banking policy for Chapel Hill offers a great example of a tool for protecting low-income neighborhoods in the face of the headwinds of gentrification. I would like to see Town of Carrboro acquire more land for its bank, although the current supply of available land is of course very limited. Another interesting option is Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH), or market-rate housing that is “naturally” affordable because of its older age, smaller size, or fewer amenities. NOAH provides a key part of the housing stock for households earning less than 80%

of AMI, including many households of color. By tapping into the Town's Affordable Housing Fund, Carrboro can make the necessary repairs and renovations to protect NOAH as workforce housing – as opposed to being redeveloped to serve high-end rental and ownership markets.

### **Transportation, Infrastructure and Environmental Justice**

- 12. What can the town do to make public transportation function better for low-income workers, hourly workers, senior citizens and the disabled? Describe your own public transportation usage; in what ways has your use of public transportation informed your perspective on our present system?**

Transportation drives Carrboro's land use policy as we move toward denser neighborhoods where people walk, bicycle, or take transit to get around. I'm especially interested in adding weekend and evening bus service to assist many low-income workers on night shifts, such as housekeepers at UNC Hospital and custodial workers in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools. I would also like to create more awareness around free and very reliable transportation services for the elderly and disabled in our community including Easy Rider, which is offered on an as-needed basis.

As a resident of Lake Hogan Farms, I don't use transit nearly as much as I should. It entails a 1.5 mile walk to Morris Grove Elementary School, and then a 1.5 mile walk back home. Doable? Of course. Convenient? Not as much as I wish. If I were elected to the Board, I would love to pilot a project bringing transit to the northern neighborhoods, with stops along Homestead Road. By making transit more accessible at a time when we are also trying to get residents out of their cars, I think we can up the ridership in this part of town.

Of course, we also need to look beyond our municipal boundaries. Our town's continued success depends on a significant investment in the transportation infrastructure connecting our businesses and people with those in other communities. That's why I'm a proponent of the North-South Bus Rapid Transit, leveraging federal funding to speed up travel between Eubanks Road and Southern Village through dedicated bus lanes and traffic signal priority. As an Alderwoman, I would also support extensions of BRT to Hillsborough, UNC's Eastowne office park, Carrboro and White Cross – and on an even broader scale, with regional lines operated by GoTriangle.

- 13. Define “environmental justice” as it relates to our community. Do you see any model environmental justice work being undertaken locally? Describe how you believe a racial equity framework should be applied to new sustainable infrastructure or greenway projects?**

Research shows that low-income communities of color face the greatest risk of environmental hazards. As is the case in the Rogers Road Neighborhood, low-income communities of color are more likely to live near landfills and highways carrying additional pollutants in the air and water. The pollutants put residents at higher risk of asthma, cardiovascular and respiratory disease, and cancer. Sadly, these are the very same communities already stressed by poverty, unemployment, and inadequate access to health care and fresh food. Fortunately for the Rogers Rd-Eubanks Rd neighborhoods, there is exceptionally strong community leadership in addressing some of these environmental justice issues through the Rogers Road

Neighborhood Association, and specifically Brother Robert Campbell and David Caldwell.

At the heart of environmental justice is the conviction that access to clean air, water and soil and to a healthy, safe, livable community are fundamental human rights. As a member of the Board, I will protect these rights as fully as possible. To ensure cleaner air, I will be a strong advocate for putting in place the needed changes so the Town can work toward the Community Climate Action Plan's goal of a 50% reduction in greenhouse emissions by 2025. That means getting people out of cars, and transitioning homes and businesses away from nonrenewable energy and toward solar and other renewable sources. For cleaner water and soil, the Town must put in place stricter ordinances to counteract the increasing volume of runoff occurring during large storm events. It should be the responsibility of new developments to install the needed stormwater infrastructure to keep runoff at bay. In older subdivisions, the Town may need to step in and pay for the retrofitting of homes with larger pipes to reduce stormwater runoff and flooding. That's clearly a big expense for the Town to incur but hopefully, the Stormwater Enterprise Fund can cover a significant portion of the cost.

### **Policing**

**14. How would you work to ensure improved relationships between citizens and law enforcement? What suggestions do you have to increase diversity (by race, class and gender) in our police department?**

It is essential that there is a level of trust established between law enforcement and citizens. All members of our community should be able to feel as though law enforcement is there to protect them, not to hurt them. I think there are a few different ways to go about improving this relationship. The first is that those policing the community should be members of the community. Carrboro police department should be members of the Carrboro community, and therefore aware of the specific concerns of the community. The more familiar you are with the people you are protecting, the better job you can do in protecting them. Another way to establish these levels of trust is to have police out in the community in an unofficial setting. This could include going into schools and talking to kids about policing, something that could both establish trust at a young age and help get kids interested in becoming police. This could also include volunteering in the community, coming out to community events, and just getting to know their neighbors and establishing personal connections within their community. Increasing diversity in the law enforcement can help eliminate the "us vs them" narrative between community members and the police. Again this could come from talking to kids in school, but also from making an effort to be out in the community communicating with people who may not otherwise consider police work an option for them. Finally, I believe an equally important way to improve relationships between citizens and law enforcement is to train police in a non-violent, non-bias manner. This should include extensive bias training, and an emphasis on a non-violent approach to law enforcement before entering the field, along with additional training throughout their careers. One way to establish trust is to eliminate the patterns or profiling that come from police, and I believe bias training is an important first step in this process.

**15. Do you support citizen review of police departments? Why or why not?**

Civilian oversight boards can help hold police officers accountable for misconduct that may be overlooked or not handled in a way that benefits the community. Having members of the community that the police serve in charge of overseeing their conduct can enhance a sense of trust between community members and police. Review boards can help hold police officers accountable for their actions. However, around the country there have been some varying results that have come from review boards, depending on how they are implemented. A case study on a review board in Los Angeles found that boards often were more lenient with police officers than the heads of police departments. Their identified reason for this is that in order to sit on the review board, an extensive background in law was necessary. While in theory this could make sense, it excluded a huge portion of individuals, and most often the individuals who are most affected by police brutality. Police boards of individuals from more diverse backgrounds, such as the one in Chicago, have been seen to decrease complaints about excessive force from police officers. While I do support a review board in Carrboro in order to hold police officers accountable for their actions, it should incorporate citizens from various backgrounds, races, and socioeconomic statuses in order to include a fair representation of the community being policed.

**16. [If a candidate for Chapel Hill Town Council] What is your position on citizen review of the UNC police department? What is your present understanding of the co-jurisdictional authority of the Chapel Hill Police and the UNC Police? What is your assessment of the current relationship between the two entities? N/A**

- What responsibility should the Town of Chapel Hill ultimately bear for the conduct of UNC-Chapel Hill campus police on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus?
- Do you feel it is important that the public know the specifics of the co-jurisdictional relationship between the two departments? If so, how do you propose to engage the community on the matter?

**17. [If a candidate for Carrboro Board of Alderman] What is your assessment of the town's response to the racial profiling by the Carrboro Police Department as outlined in the recent Dr. Frank Baumgartner study on race and policing?**

The report by Dr. Frank Baumgartner highlighted the extent of the racial profiling in traffic stops. It provides hard evidence that police officers are more likely both to pull over and search black or Hispanic drivers. These rates are even higher for young people and men, making young black men some of the biggest targets for traffic stops and searches, something that has been seen all over the country. The report also shows that this issue is not only a national issue but is happening right here in our own community. This should be an eye opener that our police need to be held accountable for the unjust ways in which they enforce traffic laws. Small traffic infractions are used as excuses to search and arrest minorities at higher rates. Since the publication of the study, police officers are required to provide documents outlining citizens' rights to deny police searches at a traffic stop. This resulted in a decrease in the number of searches after traffic stops. Further actions since the report have included further training, discussion of advisory boards, and town meetings. While these are all important steps, the town needs to continue to address these problems. Overall, I support the town's response, one that called for action in order to fix the discrimination occurring in traffic stops. However, I believe that further action needs to be taken, simply talking about the issue will not solve it. Extensive

bias training and a citizen advisory board could both help to hold officers accountable for their actions and help put a stop to the disparities in Carrboro traffic stops.

### **Business and Labor**

**18. What more can our town do within its jurisdictional authority to promote living wages?**

While the Town cannot require local businesses to pay a living wage, it can promote Orange County Living Wage's voluntary living wage certification program. To qualify, an employer must pay all full- and part-time employees at least \$14.25 (or, \$12.75 if there are employer-provided health benefits). First certified in 2016, the Town is one of our earliest certifications and to its tremendous credit, raised the wages of some part-time employees in order to qualify. The Town also issued a proclamation on Labor Day 2018, designating it as Living Wage Day. We hope it will do so again this Labor Day. Perhaps most importantly, the Town can use its connections to the business community to make more employers aware of OCLW's certification program, and urge them to join our growing roster. As chair of OCLW, I'm proud to report that we now have 200 living wage employers on our roster. Together, these employers have lifted wages by nearly \$720,000 and injected \$2.2 million into our regional economy over the past four years. Living wages are a win-win for our workers and local economy!

**19. What do you believe are the main reasons or barriers as to why people of color are not attracted to Chapel Hill/Carrboro to start (or relocate) a business?**

There can be a variety of reasons people of color are reluctant to locate in Chapel Hill-Carrboro: our high rent, high taxes, and inadequate parking immediately come to mind. Some small business owners would argue that they are over-regulated, too. I believe that the community's demographics are also a factor. At least in Carrboro, white households make up 2/3 of our population. The remaining 1/3 is split among households that are African American (10%), Hispanic (14%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (8%). Finally, transportation is certainly an issue for many minority-owned businesses. Carrboro is a difficult commute by car for folks living in Durham or the surrounding area, and transit is not always accessible or affordable for many Carrboro-based workers.

**20. What are the existing governmental policies or programs that harm or promote business development for entrepreneurs and/or people of color?**

Orange County offers a Small Business Loan Fund to support the growth of local businesses and it is available to all residents with an equity contribution of at least 10%. Yet for reasons I don't fully understand, the fund is highly underutilized. During the past six years, just 12 loans have been awarded, 9 to female-owned businesses and 2 to minority-owned businesses. Out of these 21 loans, just one was approved for a Carrboro business (which was the only business to apply). In addition, Town of Carrboro runs a revolving loan fund for small businesses, but it too has a low participation rate. I understand the Town is trying to increase participation in its revolving loan fund, especially among minority-owned businesses, by making the paperwork less cumbersome and eliminating a requirement that a business must have first been rejected by two banks before applying.

### **Demography and Engagement**

**21. In what ways can local governance better promote student engagement?**

- **What are you doing to engage the student community in your campaign?**
- **What should be the role of local elected officials in engaging with student-lead, anti-racist organizing on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus?** N/A

Young people, ages 25-34, many of whom are graduate and professional students, comprise one-fifth of our town's population. Clearly, it would be great to see these young people with more representation on

Carrboro's Board of Aldermen. So as a first step, I would strongly encourage more young people to run for office. In addition, there are 18 actively meeting boards and commissions in Carrboro on issues including affordable housing, arts, greenways, human services, planning, recreation and parks, stormwater, multi-modal transportation, and youth. In other words, there is something for everybody! Yet, only two undergraduate/graduate students sit on a Board or Commission. I would encourage students and young people to bring their voices and concerns to this critically important mechanism in the town's policymaking process. And finally, I would support and foster efforts to engage student and non-student residents living in downtown residential neighborhoods – with the Good Neighborhood Initiative being the most obvious and impactful example. I was delighted to join the Good Neighborhood Initiative and canvass Carrboro neighborhoods on August 19.

To engage students in my campaign, I am very fortunate to have the part-time assistance of Chloe Grill, a Duke University student majoring in public policy. Chloe is reaching out to her high school friends who are still registered to vote in Carrboro, to enlist their help with and support in my campaign – which includes a well-organized absentee ballot drive. Meanwhile, I am reaching out to students living in neighborhoods outside of Lake Hogan Farms, seeking their assistance with lit drops and other volunteer efforts this fall.

**22. Assess the town's response to shifting demographics in our community. In what ways can the town improve access to services and communication generally with non-native-English-speaking populations? How can our town do a better job of welcoming immigrants to our community without creating tensions with other underserved communities?**

Carrboro's demographics are clearly shifting, as our percentage of white households decreased from 67% in 2000 to 64% in 2018. This corresponds with an increase in Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander households, many of whom are immigrants and refugees. Fortunately, our community already has in place some tremendous support services for these non-native-English speaking populations including El Centro Hispano, Latino Community Credit Union, and the Refugee Support Center. Among the 425 families served through the local hunger relief initiative, PORCH, of which I am a director, about 2/3 are refugees or undocumented immigrants. Tucked inside their fresh food bags each month (with vegetables and fruits native to their countries), are flyers that have been translated into Burmese/Karen and Spanish. These flyers share information about all of the support services available in the community, ranging from literacy and computer workshops to accessibility to transportation and health care. We also offer non-partisan voter registration at our fresh food delivery sites.

Perhaps most importantly, our Town must ensure that *all* of our residents feel safe, especially during this time of ICE raids. I applaud our police department for visiting some of our local businesses to remind employees of their rights should there be an ICE raid, and of our town's commitment in keeping them safe in this climate of fear and hostility.

**23. How would you characterize our town's readiness to ensure a full and accurate count in the upcoming census? How can our municipal government increase citizen participation?**

Gathering an accurate and full census count for Carrboro – and North Carolina – is critically important for a number of reasons. The census count affects the numbers of seats North Carolina occupies in the U.S. House of Representatives. It determines how \$400 billion dollars of federal funding is spent each year on infrastructure and related services such as: hospitals, job training centers, schools, senior centers, bridges, tunnels, and other-public works projects. What's more, people from all walks of life use census data to advocate for causes they care deeply about, whether it be rescuing disaster victims and locating pools of skilled workers to cancer research and disease prevention.

For all of these reasons, an accurate census count is hugely important. Among ways to ensure it is as accurate as possible, I would promote it through a wide variety of venues (social media, Town website and newsletter, WCHL's public service announcements, speaking engagements, community events, etc.). I would also ensure that sufficient translators and staff are in place to assist *all* residents with the completion of the census paperwork. Of special importance during this time of ICE raids is reassuring *all* Carrboro residents – especially those who are undocumented - that their responses are confidential and will in no way impact their status living in the United States.

### **Matters of State-Level Jurisdiction**

- 24. How should municipalities like ours express our values or policy positions in matters which are generally the domain of the state legislature (e.g., living wage policy, immigration policy, reproductive rights, etc.)?** Dillon's Rule severely limits home rule for municipalities all across North Carolina. Under Dillon's Rule, a local government's power or authority is confined to just those areas where it is specifically spelled out by the state; all other areas are off limits. Because of these limitations, Carrboro cannot lift its minimum wage above the \$7.25/hour established by the state. It cannot require developers to set aside a certain portion of rental apartments as affordable. It cannot do its banking with a credit union such as Latino Community Credit Union, even though LCCU invests heavily in underserved populations in our community. Now the state legislature is trying to tighten its grip on immigration policy, *requiring* sheriffs and other local law enforcement officials to honor detention requests from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE. This crack-down is of course in response to Sheriffs from counties such as Mecklenburg, Wake, Durham, and Buncombe who are no longer listening to ICE requests to detain some immigrants beyond the terms of their jail sentences. It is more important than ever that Carrboro join with Chapel Hill and other municipalities all across the state to lobby and advocate for getting the state "off of our back," and returning power and authority around these kinds of local issues to where it rightfully belongs: in the hands of the municipalities themselves.