



**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:	Pamela Somers Hemminger
Age/Race/Gender (with preferred pronouns):	59 White Female - she, her
Occupation/Title/Retired:	Mayor/Small Business Owner/Mother/Wife
Position sought:	Mayor of Chapel Hill
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 November 2015, I was elected Mayor after 30 years of service to the Chapel Hill community. My previous elected offices include terms as an Orange County Commissioner (2008–2012) and as chair and vice chair of the Chapel Hill– Carrboro City School Board (2004–2008). I have also served on other government bodies including the Town's Parks and Recreation Commission and Greenways Commission and as chair of the Upper Neuse River Basin Authority.

My longtime passions include the environment and social justice, and I recently served on the boards of several area nonprofits, including Orange County Habitat for Humanity, the Triangle Land Conservancy and Rainbow Soccer, and, previously, as chairwoman of the Orange-Chatham Sierra Club.

Professionally, I have worked as a business manager in the computer and real estate industries and today owns a small commercial property firm, Windaco Properties LLC. This experience in administration, financial accounting and budgeting, and property redevelopment been helpful throughout my service in various government and nonprofit positions.

I received a BA from Vanderbilt University in economics and German. Along with my husband, Brad I was deeply involved in community youth programs while raising Adam, Brian, Carly, and Duncan, all educated in the Chapel Hill–Carrboro City Schools and three of them receiving their undergraduate degrees from UNC Chapel Hill.

Through my involvement in the community, I have learned so much and have had the pleasure to meet so many people. I am a strong believer that listening is the most important part of being a leader and making sure that you are bringing diverse voices to the table before making any decision. Different perspectives and collaboration yield better outcomes for all of us.

### **2. What has motivated you to run for the office you seek?**

In 2015, my interest in running for mayor was sparked by frustration that Chapel Hill was not living up to our long-time commitment to the Rogers Road community. After looking more closely, I decided to run because the Town was not making good choices for our future.

We have limited land left in Chapel Hill and if we fill it up with only luxury apartments, we will be an expensive bedroom community with an unsustainable future. We need to have the commercial spaces in town to bring good jobs, balance our tax base and give us the dollars we need to do the things we care about – affordable housing, green spaces, education and freedom of expression.

Since taking office, I have worked hard to put us a better path for a sustainable future and am running for re-election to build on the progress we are making.

### **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.)** ○ If you have, what was the most impactful aspect of the experience? ○ If you have not, if

**elected, do you commit to register and attend this type of training? ○ Describe instances or situations in which you have applied racial equity frameworks in your work.**

I attended Racial Equity training as a school board member and, again, as a Mayor in 2016. Both sessions were equally powerful and impactful. I did not know what I did not know the first time. The things I took for granted were upended for me and gave me a whole new appreciation for discrimination and the painful knowledge that we still had not done enough work to bring equity into our way of living. The second training, I was more aware and could take in even more information. It was stunning to learn that we know the fastest way to build wealth is to own an home and we kept people of color from having that opportunity after the world war which created a cycle of poverty and made it almost impossible for black Americans to pass on wealth to their children.

It is very important to me that we have diverse voices in government. I spend a great deal of time trying to make sure we really use our equity lens when finding people to serve on our boards, task forces or focus groups. Oftentimes this has meant “reaching in” and inviting people to participate so that we have those voices represented. I always try to listen to the voices who do not necessarily speak up and invite their input before decisions are made.

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

#### **1. What strategies do you support for increasing the supply of affordable housing in Chapel Hill/Carrboro?**

Increasing the supply of affordable and workforce housing in Chapel Hill is integral to our Town's ability to thrive as an inclusive, diverse and sustainable community.

Over the past three years, we have established an Affordable Housing Strategic Plan with measurable goals for creating and preserving affordable housing in our town.

We began by assessing the housing situation in Chapel Hill, finding that 5,000 of the 22,000 dwellings in Chapel Hill are in affordable ranges.

We learned that the town has invested in over 1,000 affordable units in the past, with 336 units in public housing communities.

And we inventoried town-owned properties to identify ones that are suitable for affordable housing.

Moving forward we will employ a number of strategies to make progress toward our goal of creating 400 new units and preserving 300 existing units over 5 years.

Our efforts will serve people across income levels and across ages.

I am proud of Chapel Hill voter's resounding support for \$ 10 million in bond funds to augment the “Penny for housing” in our annual budget. I am also proud of our successful negotiations for a \$1.5 million payment-in-lieu on one new development project and 20 on-site units on another. To make the best use of these funds, we are working with partners on plans for a mixed-income affordable community on town-owned land at 2200 Homestead Road.

We are also looking to renovate our existing public housing properties with hopes of increasing density near transit.

To learn about our Affordable Housing efforts, please visit [www.chapelhillaffordablehousing.org](http://www.chapelhillaffordablehousing.org).

**2. 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?**

One step the Town took recently was to implement and fund a Employee Housing Assistance program which provides incentives to employees wishing to live in the Town they serve. The program is available for both rental and home ownership and was created based on surveys to see how many of our employees wanted to live inside the town.

**3. How can we better engage residents of public housing in municipal governance?**

The Town has taken numerous steps over the past few years to engage residents of public housing, including:

1. We have a public housing Residential Board who meet regularly to exchange information.
2. We started the People's Academy which allows participants to learn about how the Town works. The graduation ceremony includes a panel discussion with elected officials and advisory board members who share their experiences and how to get involved. To encourage participation, childcare and transportation are made available and no charge.
3. Our two year "Building Integrated Communities" program worked to build knowledge about Chapel Hill with foreign born residents by hosting listening sessions facilitated by translators.
4. Through a partnership with the Kramden Institute we offer computer skills classes to help individuals learn how to navigate the Internet. One of the learning exercises is to navigate our Town Webpage. At graduation, participants receive a computer and printer.
5. During the summer, Public Safety employees eat lunch and visit with children at our Food For the Summer sites. This year, the kids visited with police officers, the K9 units and firefighters.

**4. 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?**

We are working on better outcomes for more Accessory Dwelling Units, more Tiny Homes and more affordable senior rentals or small owner units. We work with our Affordable Housing partners and all developers to give more options for seniors on their projects. We have town owned lands and projects, like 2200 Homestead Road, coming forward that will have a senior component.

Overall, the Town supports seniors in a number of other ways including our Transit and EZ-Rider transportation services, programming at the library and providing employees with "Dementia Friendly" training.

The Town has been an active partner in our MAP – Master Aging Plan process as we know this is the fastest growing group in our community.

**5. In what ways would you like to see our town's tax base diversified? How should we move towards that?**

Diversifying our tax base is a top priority for me. Some of the steps I have taken to move us forward include:

1. Working to create more commercial spaces to attract new companies that provide good jobs. This recently included the use of performance-based incentives to accelerate the development of up to 400,000 SF of commercial office space in Glen Lennox
2. Supporting innovation and the expansion of our entrepreneurial ecosystem so that we can capture the amazing amount of spinoff companies that are growing in our community and grow them here. This has included supporting the Launch incubator program.

**6. How should the town address future possible displacement of residents of mobile home parks?**

We are working with our Affordable Housing partners to find options for people living in mobile home parks to allow them to stay in our community.

As a Mayor & Council we have made it very clear that we are not willing to rezone a property until a pathway has been found to maintain our mobile homeowners' way of life and to provide opportunities for them to stay in our community, preferably near transit.

We have four mobile home parks in Chapel Hill and none of the residents have a land lease, meaning the current owners could ask them to leave at any time. This fact combined with increasing development pressures has increased owner's interest in redeveloping these parcels. Following conversations with council members, one development project is working to keep the mobile home families on the site while building in front of the property.

I keep in touch with two other property owners to make sure that we are still working together to find the best solutions and to be clear that we will not be willing to rezone without that pathway established. I am hopeful that we will have acceptable solutions in the near future. Most of the mobile home families surveyed want to own their own home and are not interested in renting in multi-family buildings which has made finding a path forward more complex.

**7. What is your position on the Rosemary Street Vision and its impact on the Northside neighborhood?**

The Rosemary Street Vision was an inclusive process that brought many voices together. It laid out a plan to allow redevelopment in a way that fits and transitions into the neighborhood. Lower heights, activated street fronts, affordable residential units and office spaces and fewer undergraduate students were some of the requests and the Council has been working to honor those requests. Properties will redevelop over time and there needs to be community benefits of any new development.

**8. 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?**

Addressing the challenges created by rising population and increasing land costs requires thoughtful planning, creative solutions and collaboration with our partners at UNC.

The Northside Neighborhood Initiative has been successful in increasing the number of families (including black families) living in the neighborhood, keeping many of the homes coming on the market from turning into student rentals. Based on these outcomes, I'd like to see that program expanded to include the Pine Knolls neighborhood.

Overall, we have to work with the University to create a student housing strategy to make sure that the need for student rentals is not forcing families out of the market and, also, to identify the best options for meeting the needs of current and future students. To that end, the University and the Town are initiating a joint student needs assessment process this fall and will be working together to address these challenges.

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

**9. 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?**

We have an amazing transit system but have not had the funds to expand services to meet the needs of people who work early mornings, late nights and weekends.

Our Short-Range Transit Plan, which we will be rolling out this Fall, includes expanding service on weekends and evenings to certain routes which will be helpful.

Long-term we need more routes and more frequency, especially along our MLK and 15-501 transit corridors. Planning is underway for the North-South Bus Rapid Transit system along MLK Blvd and South Columbia. This project will provide increased frequency and opportunities to create more affordable and workforce housing along the route.

Another area of improvement would be to invest in alternative ride shares for people in difficult situations – like getting to work from the shelter at time that the busses may not run.

We train our drivers to be helpful to all people especially seniors, other cultures, young people and disabled.

We have a great EZ Rider system!

My use of the transit system is limited as my job requires me to go many different places at many different times. Working In Town Hall, I walk to meetings in downtown when I can and, also, carpool with colleagues to out-of-town and cross-town meetings when possible.

**10. 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?**

In 2015, my decision to run for mayor stemmed from my deep frustration with the Town's failure to meet commitments for water and sewer to the Historic Roger's Road community which had hosted the Town's landfill. My involvement with the Rogers Road

community had spanned my terms as a School Board member and as a County Commissioner and, through that work, I learned a great deal about the challenges disadvantaged communities face and the importance of bringing them to the table when coming up with solutions.

Upon taking office I worked with the Town Manager to get the water and sewer projects moving forward and completed. In addition, the council recently passed zoning changes to allow accessory dwelling units and home-owned businesses in the district. Throughout this process, I have made time to check in with community members to make sure our efforts were on track.

Another recent situation came up when the Town planned to remove the two smaller coal ash piles from our police station site. In choosing a mitigation plan we made sure it was a priority that the waste would not go to a low wealth community.

Two other examples were my work to roll out Duke Energy's Energy Saver program to 830 families in the Northside neighborhood and my work to reach a resolution with FEMA for homes in Camelot Village, an area that routinely floods.

Overall, I believe that many of the decisions we make as a Town involve environmental justice components and will continue to stay connected with our at-risk communities and to advocate for solutions that make their lives better.

### **Policing**

**11. 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?**

The Town Hall we had on policing was impactful. We all learned a great deal and our Police Department has put many of the requests into practice. It is time to hold another Town Hall and assess how we are doing and to look closely to see what our stats say after making the changes we made.

It is a difficult time to hire quality Police Officers because of the growth in our region and so many jobs available. We stress diversity in hiring and have had some success but can lose out on the pay scale, which we increased in the 2019-20 budget. It is a priority to keep a diverse force that upholds our values of respect, inclusion and individual freedom while keeping us safe.

We have one of the best Crisis Units in the state. We are dedicated to helping people through the situation and connecting them to the services they need.

**12. Do you support citizen review of police departments? Why or why not? What is your position on citizen review of the UNC police department?**

We have a Policing Advisory Commission where policing matters are discussed and recommendations are made. UNC has initiated its own advisory group and is holding forums to learn more as their new Police Chief is starting.

With over 9 protests in the last 12 months, we have been dealing with a great deal of pressure from outside groups wanting to bring hate into our community. It is imperative that we work together with UNC and be able to react quickly. Our advisory groups have been helpful in reviewing the situations afterwards to help our teams improve.

**13. [If a candidate for Chapel Hill Town Council] 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? 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?**

We have a collaborative working agreement with UNC, with both teams working to keep people safe.

We have blurred lines between the boundaries of UNC State Property and our Town Property that individuals may freely cross. When on UNC campus, the UNC Police Force takes the lead, when on Town Property or on Franklin Street, the Town Police Department takes the lead and usually UNC Police stay at the edge of campus unless asked to help. We also engage our Public Works, Traffic, Fire Department and Manager Administrative staffs to help coordinate all activities. We have a visual command center established to help better coordinate.

UNC is a State-owned property and we have no jurisdiction over their policing. We offer support and assistance when asked.

We have had several forums on recent situations. All of our Town meetings are open to the public and provide opportunities for public comment. The public is welcome to speak at our Policing Advisory Committee meetings as well. We make sure to keep folks updated with social media and news outlets. And we are happy to answer any questions.

**14. [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?**

### **Business and Labor**

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

The Town is a certified Orange County Living Wage Employer and we ask our vendors to get certified also but we are not allowed to require it. When we are negotiating for a business to come to our community through our performance-based incentive programs, we mandate that they pay a living wage amount.

**16. 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?**

Chapel Hill's Economic Development office has been working diligently to help attract, support and retain companies here but companies face many challenges here including:

- Difficulty finding affordable space
- Changes in the retail market, including increase on-line ordering
- Competition in the restaurant market with so many restaurants already here

Our business community is more diverse than before but we have had a drop in people of color which makes it feel less diverse to some groups

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

Chapel Hill is working hard to grow our entrepreneurial community by providing the resources that start-up and growing companies need to thrive.

Together with UNC and Orange County, we fund and support Launch – an award-winning, collaborative and highly successful program that is open to anyone in the community!

The Launch space on Franklin Street serves as an innovation hub, providing the resources that companies need including space, opportunities for mentoring from successful entrepreneurs, support from Chapel Hill's Economic Development team and regular opportunities to “pitch” ideas.

Building on the success at Launch, other co-working spaces have opened up to provide affordable space and a supportive work environment in our downtown as well.

**Demography and Engagement**

**18. 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?**

I have met with several student groups as I try to do at the start of each school year. We talk about projects we can work on together, volunteer opportunities and places to explore in Chapel Hill. We love the energy students bring to our community and we want to help them engage while they are here. I have held coffee chats, spoken on campus, attended student rallies, helped with awareness activities and supported many groups.

We are proud that students have taken a stand to remove racist artifacts from campus. As an elected official I have shown my support for removing these unwelcoming and disrespectful artifacts. I have spoken to the UNC Administration and several Board of Trustees about the Town values aligning with the students' requests.

**19. 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?**

Through a joint grant with UNC, Chapel Hill has rolled out the “Building Integrated Communities” project to reach into our immigrant communities to help people understand how the Town works. By listening to their experiences, we have learned what we were doing well and what we needed to improve. We have a whole new strategy for communicating in different languages and pulling in different partners to help communicate especially during emergencies.

To help foster a diverse community that respects each other's cultures, we have added several new cultural celebrations and events such as the Near & Far International Festival and the Lantern Festival. By bringing people together and exposing all of us to each other's cultures, we are building bridges of understanding and friendship.

**20. 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?**

I am part of the Governor's Census committee that has been meeting for over a year to help make a plan to be ready for April 1, 2020. It will be very important for Chapel Hill and all of Orange County to make sure we get people counted as we have grown and want to see the tax dollars come back to our community in proportion to that growth. I asked the Board of Orange County Commissioners to form a committee to start making a real plan in our community of how we are going to reach everyone and how we are going to make technology available in multiple places for everyone on April 1. The state is setting up 7 offices across the state and Durham will be our closest one. It will be important to engage many different partners to help get the word out – Schools, Churches, Businesses, Non-profits, etc . To do this, we will be using all of our media outlets and communication channels and are looking forward to what our own committee comes up with.

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

**21. 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.)?**

We advocate for what we believe is right with our state representatives and then through our other lobby groups such as Metropolitan Mayors, the North Carolina League of Municipalities and the Mayors of NC.

Encouraging other residents to go to Raleigh and be present is also important. Groups like Moms Demand Action, North Carolinians Against Gun Violence, the Orange County Peace Coalition and others have worked tirelessly to make a difference on state policy in Raleigh. We support these groups by sharing information and helping them spread the word.

As a Town, we can pass resolutions but it is more important to have conversations and advocate for what we believe is right. I have attended many sessions in Raleigh with the Governor, several Department Secretaries and Legislators from other districts. Through conversations, advocating and educating our leaders we can bring them along better and affect change.

We need to also help elect better leaders, ones who will fight for what we believe is right for the future of North Carolina that will be an inclusive government!