

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:	Joshua J Levenson
Age/Race/Gender (with preferred pronouns):	34/mixed(White/ Māori)/M
Occupation/Title/Retired:	Teacher/Canvasser
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?

I have recently begun participating in a wide range of local organizations. My local involvement has included service work with Table, schools, social justice and environmental projects. This community involvement has led me to a similar conclusion as my involvement in communities across the country and across the globe. We need to mitigate the impacts of poverty and environmental degradation.

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

I am motivated to run in the hope that the environmental impact and social cost of our waste will be more accurately reflected by our economic system. A price should be paid, at points of service and of collection, for practices that cause greenhouse gas emission, pollutant production and excess waste. I hope to use these resources to support alternative energy sources, as well as projects to support marginalized communities, especially those most adversely affected.

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.
 -
- No.
- Yes I commit to attending this type of training.

Housing Affordability and Local Taxation

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

I would vote to expand the affordable housing bond. This expansion would support those individuals who have been displaced from long-term affordable housing in obtaining comparable units with greater energy efficiency at similar, inflation-adjusted, costs. I would also create smaller units built in high density along public transportation routes for new community servants, such as teachers, in order to help them get on their feet during the first few years of their careers.

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?

I strongly support subsidizing affordable, publicly owned green tiny home/apartment rentals. These rentals could be ear-marked long-term as rentals for those who provide essential services for the community. I cannot commit to focusing these projects on new home sales due to the fact that I do not think that this would address the issue long-term. We are currently seeing huge swaths of our affordable housing being poached by developers for gentrified luxury housing. This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

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

We can expand boards of public housing residents. These boards would receive focused and prioritized attention from our representatives along with staff support to expand feedback loops in order to encourage closer consultation in these projects.

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?

I support the current affordable housing projects for seniors along with projects to protect current rentals. New affordable housing senior living centers would be focused on Net Zero design which may increase initial costs. In the interest of sustainably increasing density, I would not vote to guarantee these projects isolated environments. I would look to build more rentals above these units for quiet young people who are ready to take the stairs.

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

I do not consider it realistic to rely on retail for increased revenue. I think that, barring new developments from the state or federal government, we should plan to generate increased revenue from property taxes. Since this revenue has historically represented a high percentage of low to middle class disposable income, we should also focus the majority of increased property tax revenue on services that support the needs of these groups.

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

We should support projects to restore shelter for previous mobile home residents in more energy efficient housing.

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

I would need to consider more feedback from more Northside community members before giving a final statement. I am aware that there is frustration being expressed by some Northside residents related to traffic and student disruption. I would strongly support expanding collaborative efforts by the Jackson center and the Good-Neighbor program in order to bring the community together and potentially find solutions that enhance the community for everyone. Generally, I would support underground parking and higher density affordable housing near that area if steps could be taken to protect the character of historic communities like Northside.

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?

We can support projects to protect and strengthen these communities, block the demolition of current affordable housing and build new high density green developments that also increase public park space. Many of the most powerful projects that would address this issue would require new state leadership in order to strengthen local governments and enable them to implement new progressive, marginal property tax rates and other alternative resource collection streams.

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?

I do not use a car or Uber/lift. I rely exclusively on public transportation and my bicycle. I am excited to see BRT and expanded weekend hours to which I hope we can add some late-night service and extended regional transportation. I also would also support transforming the heavy rail into a commuter rail in the next 3-5 years. This could be accomplished by putting community pressure on the rail companies.

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?

I do not see environment justice being practiced in our community and I believe referring to EJ in our community misses almost the entire point of environmental justice. We reduced the poisoning of the air and water around Rogers road community by moving our irresponsibly toxic trash to lower income communities of color. The least we can do is separate out our bio waste and provide easily accessible compost pick-up and disposal. This is just the first, most tangible solution of hundreds that would cut our green-house gas emissions. These emissions are our greatest global injustice and they are currently devastating billions in low-income communities of color. Many dismiss our contribution as a mere grain of rice in the field but proportionately the reality is that we are contributing the whale's share and as a privileged, wealthy community we are in the best place to lead and pilot solutions.

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?

I would take this, potentially fleeting, opportunity of relative peace to decrease penalty policing efforts and replace them with greater community policing focusing on outreach and service for our youth. I am not sure if we are permitted by the current NC constitution to operate on strict quota systems. I would expand leadership training and opportunities for police with greater cultural awareness in the hope that we might retain them in well-paid positions that take full advantage of their skill sets.

15.)

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

I would support a professional lawyer/citizen review panel of judges if we had the resources available to sustain those efforts. I would support transparency by the police department to our advisory boards. This would mean that the advisory board would have access to pertinent case information when given permission by the citizens involved.

16.)

[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?

My understanding is that UNC Police are primarily responsible for what goes on on-campus with some jurisdiction over student activity surrounding campus borders. Chapel Hill Police should be permitted to pursue a suspect crossing campus and collaboration between departments should be supported up to a point. If either police department violates the rights of residents then both entities should come forward to provide all evidence that pertains to the violation.

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?

Business and Labor

18.)

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

We can increase municipal worker wages to at least \$16 since the cost of living in Chapel Hill far exceeds the surrounding area for which a minimum wage has been set at \$14.25. We can also provide incentives in order to support and promote all businesses stepping up to do the same.

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?

Beyond personal community preferences, I am not aware of entrepreneurs of color having distinct criteria from white entrepreneurs. I know that small college towns have limited growth potential and high start-up overhead and rental costs which may limit smaller investors from seeing rapid returns on anything beyond labors of love. Chapel Hill and Carrboro have attracted people of color to start up passion projects with the support of the community and these projects have eventually flourished. I would look to incubate and nurture future projects that have an eye towards social service and environmental sustainability.

20.)

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

I am not aware of government projects designed exclusively for people of color but I do know that our state government supports UNC to enhance 'coworking' spaces with additional resources. I think that our municipal government should explore similar projects to help low-income community members get business projects off the ground.

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?

I am communicating with campus organizations and canvassing students with the help of their student peers. If elected I hope to expand student-involvement projects.

- What should be the the role of local elected officials in engaging with student-lead, anti-racist organizing on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus?

Local officials should listen carefully to organizers and student leaders while providing all possible resources to these groups to support their safe and effective movement.

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?

It is important to understand that these are not competing agendas and that both are of critical importance if we intend to live in a just and moral community. Projects to employ immigrants for communication and support services in order to lift up their community members should be enhanced on the municipal level. Funding for expansion of groups like El Hispanico should also be prioritized as well as other effective initiatives for underserved communities.

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?

We are underprepared like most of the state, so we should allocate funds and a part-time staff member to increase census participation along with additional community and municipal involvement.

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.)?

Our elected leaders should foster a safe space for organizing and a platform for community expression. Leaders should utilize the limited number of steps that are constitutionally allowable in order to support well-being and justice throughout our community, even if this means temporarily acting behind the scenes.