



**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:	Tai Huynh
Age/Race/Gender (with preferred pronouns):	22, Asian-American, he/him/his
Occupation/Title/Retired:	Student
Position sought:	Chapel Hill Town Council

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 been on the Housing Advisory Board for almost three years, am an after school/summer camp volunteer at the RENA Community Center, and served on the Committee for Civic Engagement started by Councilor Allen Buansi. I also was a mentor for high-schoolers who are refugees or children of refugees through Project Jumpstart, a program of the Refugee Community Partnership. The work I do in the community is divided between spending time within government and spending time with people and families who want a home and quality amenities. As a result, I've seen the mismatch between conversations that take place on our Boards and Council and those that happen in community centers. I've learned that so much of the Town's conversations are about land-use, zoning, and approving discrete developments. But so many of our community centers are tackling issues of affordable living, of resource-providing, of community building. In order to decrease the gap in discourse between governing bodies and residents, especially within the scope of the Housing Advisory Board, the discussion regarding development in our Town should be a holistic one--vision-oriented and community driven so that each Advisory Board isn't scrambling when a new development proposal comes before them.**

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

**My first year at UNC, I noticed that a Carolina Dining Services worker was eating on break alone, so I joined her. We kicked it off, and she became one of my dearest companions in the Chapel Hill community. She did a service for me, and I can never thank her enough. She managed to pull me out of the campus bubble and expose me to the warm embrace of the chapel hill community at large. However, it wasn't all great on the other side of Franklin St. She invited me over for lunch multiple times to her home in public housing. Through becoming her friend, I learned about the affordable housing crisis in our community. I wanted to advocate for her and people like her and help solve this problem so I joined the Housing Advisory Board for the town.**

**Serving on the board and becoming more involved in the community over the years has shown me the underlying inequities that we must address in our town. I'm running for Town Council because I want to bring these inequities to the surface and to bring together parts of the community that haven't always been invited to the table. There is a lot to be proud of in our town and yet there is still much work needed to ensure that all of those residing in Chapel Hill have access to necessary services and opportunities to live with dignity.**

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've attended an REI Groundwater training.**

**The problem is in the water aspect. If all the fish are getting sick, it's not the fish that are the problem, it's the water. The institutional aspect of racism in America was the most impactful part. Additionally, we were given specific studies and arguments against the "people of color should pull themselves up by the bootstraps" argument people make. Being armed with statistics on how poor white communities have better social status and treatment than rich people of color gives me the lens to address underlying inequities in our community.**

**At the Groundwater training, we talked about marked and unmarked entities. Specifically, I learned about how we unknowingly deploy language to racialize formal institutions in our communities. We mark communities of color and leave unmarked those that belong to the majority. While this marking might seem innocent, it directs conversations, diverts attention, dictates funding. As a result of this training, I am more conscious of how I use language to name and understand entities around me.**

I am the founder and CEO of a social venture that helps local governments equitably process public input so that they can be more inclusive in the resident engagement process. Because our product is a software, I work to make sure that we are coding a platform that empowers the voices of racial minorities. My work on the Institute of Politics required that I apply a racial equity lens to determine what projects we took on. We even took on a project for the NC NAACP to help them build out their digital deployment strategy and built a mobile app for use at the Moral Monday March in Raleigh. Last, I served on the Committee for Civic Engagement. Our charge was the improve racial diversity on advisory boards, and so I worked with a task force to develop a curriculum for integrating more people of color in our local government.

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

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

**Our first priority should be bringing the populations we hope to serve into the conversation and applying a human-centered design approach. only then can we chart a plan of action instead of discussing discrete instances of affordable housing here and there. Right now, our development process is convoluted, and notoriously laborious. We have a bad reputation with developers so we aren't getting the best ones with the best ideas. We need to fix the process, have a strong commitment to community priorities, and be upfront with developers about what we expect from anyone that builds in our communities. We should engage the community in an effort to set unified expectations for affordable housing so that developments will incorporate affordability as a priority across the Town.**

**We also need to build mixed-use, mixed-income communities along transit corridors. We should promote transit-oriented, walkable, mixed-use, mixed income development to keep Chapel Hill affordable as older developments drop in price. We cannot effectively restrict supply. As town councilor, I will advocate for housing that pairs commercial and residential development so that employees can work, live, and play in one place without creating a lot of traffic. For example, other communities have incentivized developers building along transit corridors by reducing required parking spaces if they build affordable housing units reserved for residents earning 60% of AMI. This way, we will build inclusive and sustainable communities. We should explore and entertain workforce housing that pairs commercial and residential development so that employees can work, live, and play in one area without creating a lot of traffic. This way, we will build inclusive and sustainable communities.**

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?

**In order to make sure that everyone who works in our town has a place to live, we need to prioritize building mixed-use, mixed-income communities along transit corridors. This way, residents, regardless of socio-economic status, can live in town, and use public transit to get to work. A specific path to achieve more integrated communities is workforce housing. Whenever the Town entertains a development that brings jobs, there needs to be a study into where employees are going to live. By being intentional about growing jobs and housing together, we can secure affordable housing for those that provide essential services in our town.**

**We should implement workforce development programs and pathways in order to increase incomes of residents and not just lower the cost of homes.**

**Additionally, increasing the supply of housing cannot be addressed by solely looking at our town, we must consider housing needs, developments, and initiatives in the County and coordinate as a region in order to ensure affordability. In this vein, stakeholders across industries and sectors must collaborate in order to make sure all communities have access to the necessary amenities to flourish.**

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

- 6. Right now, in order for residents to be heard, they have to approach government. Government doesn't go to them. Residents of public housing face many barriers to entry to participate in local government: they work late or multiple jobs, have bills to pay, have children to take care of, and/or cannot use transit to get to public meetings because transit in our town is unreliable late at night when Town Hall meetings take place. To fix this, government staff have to meet people where they're at. We can better engage residents of public housing by holding public input sessions at gathering centers near where they live. We need to make sure that political participation is the least cumbersome for residents in public housing, and offer childcare at public meetings so that parents can participate without having to constantly search for childcare.**

**Our engagement should also consider public housing residents that don't speak English. A dear friend of mine who lives in public housing primarily speaks Karen and Burmese. Right now, public meetings are inaccessible to her, and decisions are often made without her input due to this language barrier. To address this issue, we should make sure that public information materials and public meetings are translated into multiple languages that reflect and address the linguistic diversity of public housing.**

- 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 strongly believe that in order to accommodate residents of all ages, we need to be intentional about what we build and how we can secure affordability. In this vein, we should approve projects that serve seniors and have affordable units in them. This way, seniors of all income levels can afford to age in place. Additionally, I will support a property tax freeze for seniors who have lived in town for a determined number of years and receive a fixed income. A tax freeze for long-time residents on a fixed income will allow seniors to live affordably in the town they have contributed to and lived in for so long.**

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

**Right now, homeowners bear the brunt of the tax base because our residential tax base is disproportionate to our commercial tax base. For example, we have not built new office space in the**

**town for the past seven years. In order to diversify our tax base, we should build and rent out office space to mid-sized companies. We should also look to build an innovation district with wet lab and coworking spaces that motivates small and mid-sized businesses to commercialize, grow, and stay in Chapel Hill. For instance, 85% percent of healthcare research at UNC is commercializeable, but groups that do this research commercialize and grow their bio-tech startups elsewhere because the commercial infrastructure to grow and run a business does not exist in Chapel Hill.**

**Additionally, I strongly believe that the backbone of commercial diversification of the tax base includes minority and women-owned businesses. As such, I will advocate for fast-track permitting and inspection processes and waiving fees for minority and women-owned businesses so that they can establish their businesses faster and easier--and our town will reap the benefits of their taxes that much sooner. I also will support the creation of a Innovation District in Downtown in order to boost our entrepreneurial ecosystem and reserve a portion of that space for minority and women-owned businesses.**

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

**The town can address future displacement of residents by encouraging the development of tiny homes, which are a green, sustainable, and attractive solution to affordable housing crises across the country. The town should also coordinate with regional partners in Orange County to help displaced residents find new homes. Additionally, affordable housing organizations such as Casa and Empowerment Inc. should be involved in the process of helping residents transition to new housing at an affordable rate. Last, the Town has been working with Empowerment Inc. on the Housing Displacement Program, which secures housing for displaced people in Chapel Hill. This effort should be highlighted and continued as an integral part of the Town's affordable housing policy.**

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

**First and foremost, neighborhoods that are impacted by any project should be fully involved in the visioning process. We also must make sure that communities should not be unduly transformed, but they should not remain economically stagnated or unconnected either. With these two criteria in mind, I think the Rosemary Street Vision strikes a good balance between maintaining the character of the neighborhood while connecting it with other parts of downtown. There are important community benefits in the vision such as the construction of space for businesses and affordable housing. Also, the vision prioritizes connectivity among blocks between Franklin and Rosemary so that fewer cars are on the road causing traffic. Last, the limitation of surface parking enhances the streetscaping and character of the district--balancing economic development and the maintenance of the neighborhood feel.**

**As long as residents of Rosemary and Northside are involved in the engagement process, and their input is factored into the final decision making, I think that increasing connectivity, introducing more commercial space, and reducing reliance on cars and traffic in the neighborhood are all good things.**

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 first step in the process of addressing these pressures is to ask impacted communities what their needs are so that we can create a more holistic, integrated vision for development and growth that does not discriminate with regards to race or socioeconomic status. We should prioritize community benefits such as affordable housing, greenspace, and community centers whenever a development is considered. By building housing specifically for students downtown, we can reduce the number of student rentals in Northside. Last, we should diversify our tax base, and balance property tax revenue with commercial tax revenue so that households are not carrying the tax burden. These measures will make sure that people are affordably living, that students are not negatively impacting residents in Northside, and that land-prices and property taxes do not skyrocket.**

### **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?

**Buses should have more dependable schedules with routes that start earlier in the mornings and run later into the night to accommodate residents who start really early shifts or work the graveyard shift. Public transit should also be active on university holidays so that residents have a reliable way to get to work when students are on break. To this point, we should adopt micro-transit policies to fulfill the transit needs of residents when the university is not in session without giving rise to the empty bus phenomenon that occurs during the summer months. Beyond issues of schedule and hours of operation, bus shelters should be more durable and dignified so that they are safe to stand under, can withstand the elements during all seasons, and are appealing. A sign-post on the side of the road is not a safe, accessible, or appealing place for low-income workers, hourly workers, senior citizens, and the disabled to wait for the bus. Last, bus routes should go beyond downtown and its immediate surroundings-- they should travel even to extra-territorial jurisdictions like RENA so that those who work in and commute to Chapel Hill regularly have a dependable way to get to town.**

- Describe your own public transportation usage; in what ways has your use of public transportation informed your perspective on our present system?

**I used the bus system as my main mode of transportation my entire first year at Carolina, and now I ride the bus to get to class or Carrboro on occasion. I mainly either walk or moped to my destinations currently. Using the bus regularly for a year informed me of the shortcomings as well as the benefits of this mode of transit in our town. I learned that some routes are jam-packed with people while others barely have ridership, that our buses are clean and well-kept, and that the buses were reasonably dependable, but could use a schedule with longer hours of operation.**

13. Define “environmental justice” as it relates to our community. Do you see any model environmental justice work being undertaken locally?

**Environmentally unjust policies disproportionately burden low income communities because they often lack the resources to hire attorneys and fight for better environmental policies in their neighborhoods. In Chapel Hill, the landfill in the Rogers Road community is an example of this phenomenon. Instead of taking steps to reduce our waste and find innovative ways to process trash, we now ship our waste to another poor county that also lacks the resources to fight for environmental rights. Therefore, we need to integrate technology and education into communities so that children and families from a young age are aware of how to be good stewards of their environment. We cannot outsource our problems to achieve environmental justice. Environmental justice will be achieved when we educate and innovate ourselves and each other to become cleaner consumers and producers of waste.**

- Describe how you believe a racial equity framework should be applied to new sustainable infrastructure or greenway projects?

**Applying a racial equity framework to new sustainable infrastructure or greenway projects begins with racially equitable resident engagement. We need to ask residents from diverse backgrounds about their needs and complaints. Only then can we invest in infrastructure that meets the specific needs of residents of color.**

### **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?

**Right now, relationships between residents and law enforcement are negatively impacted by the fact that police officers cannot afford to live in Chapel Hill--resulting in a situation where residents and police officers don't interact with each other in a community setting. As such, we should focus on making Chapel Hill affordable so that residents can grow up and serve the communities they've interacted with as residents. In order to fix this issue, I will continue and build upon the highly successful people's academy that created opportunities for residents to engage in officer-led programming. An overlooked, but large by-product of people's police academies is that people of diverse backgrounds with regard to race, class, and gender gain more access to the force, and are able to see the opportunity for their inclusion in law enforcement jobs. In sum, facilitating productive interactions between residents and their police not only improves relationships between the two parties, but also makes working in police departments more accessible and realistic for minority groups.**

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 support civil review of police departments because they hold police departments accountable to equitable treatment of residents. Towns and cities across the country have adopted three models of civil police review: investigator-focused, review-focused, and auditing. I believe that an auditing model is the best fit for Chapel Hill because it allows for broad review of police misconduct, and encourages representation (racial and socioeconomic) proportionate to that in the town.**



**I think the UNC police department should also be subject to civil review so that they are also held accountable to standards of just policing, especially when it comes to race.**

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? My current assessment of the current relationship between Chapel Hill Police and UNC Police is that it is not very collaborative. The two departments do not communicate well, and have varying standards for policing and conduct. They do not engage in racial equity and bias training together, and do not address community issues such as protests or police discrimination as a unified entity. These are issues on which the two departments should work together to ensure a comprehensive, unified, and just policing approach on both campus and in the town.**

**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? I think there should be a civil review of both police departments, and ultimately, the Town should have a say in the type of data UNC campus police collects regarding incident handlings and conduct, and in the actions going forward to improve overall performance and equitable policing. However, campus police should not be micro-managed by the Town because the campus police faces a separate set of issues that campus police personnel and directors are the most fit to address.**

**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? It is extremely important that the public know the specifics of the co-jurisdictional relationship between the two police departments. One very successful method to achieve this public awareness that has been tried and tested in university towns across the country is the civil police academy that orients and educates residents and students on the mandates and expectations of both departments in the community at large.**

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?  
**In its effort to attract new business, Chapel Hill should be intentional about only soliciting businesses that pay their employees a living wage, and establishing a reputation for Chapel Hill as a town that has zero tolerance for companies that do not pay a living wage. Additionally, for new business, I will advocate for expedited permitting and reduced inspection costs for companies that pay a living wage to all their workers. For businesses that already operate in Chapel Hill, I believe that we should publish a list of companies that**

**pay their workers a living wage--providing these businesses with free marketing good, fair, and respectful establishments that are worth the town's patronizing.**

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?

**I think there are three main reasons or barriers as to why people of business are not motivated to move or start their business in Chapel Hill. First, the permitting and inspection process is too bureaucratic for minority business-owners, who are typically dissuaded by inaccessible business formalization processes. Second, there are a lack of resources in Chapel Hill specifically for minority-owned businesses. Minority-owned businesses have to overcome a separate host of problems when starting a business such as establishing credibility and building networks in a traditionally non-diverse space. Therefore, the town should fund specific programs that open up entrepreneurial resources to minority-owned businesses so that they can establish credibility in a space that is not typically occupied by people of color. Third, people want to live, work, and play in the same place, and Chapel Hill does not have the cultural gathering infrastructure that attracts people from diverse backgrounds. As such, we should start investing in diverse third spaces that will nurture multicultural business-owners and businesses.**

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

**Zoning policies in Chapel Hill that prioritize residential development over commercial development creates an environment that cannot accommodate the growth of small and mid-sized businesses in the town. We have not built office space in the past seven years; and, as a result of the limited supply of office space, existing space is too expensive for growing businesses.**

**While there are strong accelerator and business development programs/services in our town, they are largely inaccessible to people of color because accessing them requires an intimate knowledge of a largely white network of professionals. I strongly believe that these programs should be marketed in communities of color, and should be actively seeking minority-owned businesses for future cohorts and mentoring programs.**

### **Demography and Engagement**

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

**Local governments can better engage students by promoting the opportunity students have to serve on advisory boards. A large segment of the student population is passionate about affordable housing, climate change, and innovation ecosystems. These are all charges of local government, but students are not aware of the reaching mandate local government has. On Council, and as a student, I will encourage students to turn their passion into action by serving on advisory boards that influence important decisions regarding the growth of our town.**

What are you doing to engage the student community in your campaign?

**I am a student running for Town Council, and my campaign is run entirely by students. As such, we are getting students out to canvas and listen to resident concerns. We are also planning a thorough Get Out The Vote effort in order to get a lot of students to turn out during early voting.**

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

**Local elected officials should listen to the concerns of student-lead anti-racist organizing on campus. Town Council should promote inclusivity and racial equity in the town. Therefore, elected officials should engage with and listen to activist organizations and organizers that are addressing real concerns about racial equity on campus. Engagement can look like conversations, action plan for student involvement in broader civic engagement in the town, or events that promote inclusiveness and gathering of diverse residents in Chapel Hill.**

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?

**The town should ensure that all public information, meeting notices, and information relevant to public services and community meetings are translated into Spanish, Karen, and Burmese at the least. This way, language is not a barrier of entry to local government and civic participation for those residents that are non-native English speakers. Every resident of our town deserves to know what is happening in his or her neighborhood.**

-How can our town do a better job of welcoming immigrants to our community without creating tensions with other underserved communities?

**The City of Louisville does a Welcome Academy that is a two week long orientation informs immigrants of all the resources, services, and amenities they have access to. We should adopt a similar program that makes sure immigrants know how to get the information or resources they need to live a fulfilling life in Chapel Hill. Specific programs in this Welcome Academy could include workshops on what kinds of resources schools provide students, how to contact your representatives and government staff in case of questions or complaints, sessions that detail resources on how to start a business or apply for jobs, and an orientation at the police station on what officers do for our 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?

**As of now, I don't think our town is ready to ensure a full and accurate count in the upcoming census. This is because our municipal government does not meet residents where they are at. Instead residents have to go out of their way to participate in local governing. To address this issue, government staff should do more digital engagement with residents to collect public input from those who don't have the time or transit to get to physical meetings that go on late into the night. Also, government staff should go to resident meetings and organizations that are already happening. Going to community centers and meetings where smaller groups organize will show residents of diverse backgrounds that**

**their municipal governments care about their input--increasing overall civic participation and making the census more accurate.**

### **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)

**Municipalities like ours should support local activist organizations that are working to address policy positions in the domain of state legislatures. We have the power to work with organizations and put pressure on state legislators to make sure that they don't pass policy unaligned with our values. We can also work within our mandate to make sure that businesses are incentivized to pay their workers a living wage, that immigrants feel safe in our communities, that women have access to affordable healthcare, and that LGBTQIA+ people have the resources to receive healthcare and secure affordable housing.**