

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

City of Tuscaloosa

Office: City Council, District 5

Candidate:

Sam Badger

1. What do you see as the top three issues facing the City of Tuscaloosa? How should those issues be addressed?

The top three issues facing Tuscaloosa right now are infrastructure, blight, and gentrification. As for infrastructure, we need to swiftly and efficiently deal with the hundreds of problems that I have noticed in my district, including crumbling roads, poor lighting, storm drain clogging, etc. This will help improve quality of life and business prospects. The solution for blight will be to buy out abandoned properties and flipping them, preferably building new affordable homes and small businesses in their place. Gentrification is a more complex issue and will involve emphasizing homeownership and affordable housing developments as opposed to the current luxury/student apartment paradigm we see today. I will pursue all these issues with an open mind, using both our existing institutional structures and funding new initiatives where necessary.

2. Downtown Tuscaloosa has experienced significant growth in recent years, adding hotels, residences, restaurants, and retail. In your view, what needs to be done to build on that momentum?

I am happy to see development in downtown Tuscaloosa, however my district and other places in Tuscaloosa have been sorely left out. When we develop our city, we need to be making sure all our neighborhoods are being lifted up. My program of increasing the beauty, safety and prosperity of our east side will create a more hospitable business environment. As for specific ways of attracting business as we improve our neighborhoods, I am not taking anything off the table. If we need to look at tax incentives, zoning, etc. then we will do that.

3. There is significant community interest in recruiting knowledge-based industries to Tuscaloosa to provide local employment opportunities for the best and brightest graduates of our institutions of higher education. What is your view of how this goal can be achieved?

I think making sure that Tuscaloosa is a place where our university students can settle down is a goal worth pursuing. However, I would caution against overemphasizing the interests of parties that do not yet live here over those that do. There are many people in my district that have no four-year college degree, and they do not have the qualifications to get those type of jobs. I think it's a longer-term game of improving our education outcomes, neighborhoods, and baseline level of prosperity. Again, none of this is to say that we should not pursue those types of high paying jobs but getting those type of industries here alone will not solve our problems.

4. There is public discussion about a large sports/recreation complex being developed on the former McFarland Mall site. What is your view on this proposed development and should public funds be used to invest in the project?

I think getting more entertainment opportunities in Tuscaloosa is a good idea and will increase our quality of life and economic conditions. I do however need to be made sure that this project will not be

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a gentrifying force (as these types of complexes often are) and I am not yet convinced. The ideal situation is that the city puts public funds into it and gets a significant level of control, or Tuscaloosa citizens get some level of equity in the project in exchange for their tax dollars.

5. What is your vision for parks and recreation in Tuscaloosa and what role should the Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority (PARA) play?

We should have a plethora of high-quality public spaces in Tuscaloosa, and there has been good developments on this front in recent years. Wherever we expand housing, business, and other developments parks and recreation facilities should follow. Of course, we will need to keep an eye on gentrification and make sure that the facilities we build/expand are wanted by the people who live in the immediate area. We should be working with PARA every step of the way, but the city should be leading the charge on developments within our borders.

6. What is your position on Elevate Tuscaloosa? Do you believe Elevate Tuscaloosa funds should remain separated from general funds and used for the types of projects initially discussed, subject to customary review, need, and design requirements?

I'm generally supportive of Elevate, although I prefer other types of taxes as opposed to the sales tax, which is regressive. I like that the funds are separated from the general fund because it shows that the initiative is not just business as usual and is designed to be transformative. I think it has a significant role to play in the revitalization of district 5 that I am advocating for.

7. Do you support efforts and city funding to pursue commercial air service for Tuscaloosa? Why or why not?

I am not convinced at this time that a commercial air service is necessary for Tuscaloosa, and I would like to see other things pursued way before such a project is considered. I am not saying that this is something we should never look into, and if I can be persuaded that there is sufficient demand, and it can be done in an equitable way I will change my mind.

8. The city has multiple budgets, the five largest being the General Fund Operating, General Fund Reserve, Water/Sewer Operating, Water/Sewer Reserve, and Elevate Tuscaloosa. How should each of these be utilized and managed?

Water/sewer should be used to improve our sanitation and utility infrastructure in order to ensure safe drinking water and cleanly waste disposal. Elevate should be used to promote bold new initiatives including an infrastructure facelift. The general fund should be used for everything else involved with running a city (fire department, libraries, etc.). The reserve budgets should be built up over time to fund both future projects and to be there in case of unforeseen emergencies.

9. What are the areas of city operations that you think you can bring any special knowledge or expertise? Why are those areas important to you?

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My expertise is in community organizing. This is the central philosophy I come into city politics with, and I will always make sure no one is left behind in my district. I have already knocked on thousands of doors and will continue to get to know the people of my community and fight with my whole heart to make sure they lives are more prosperous than when I first met them.

10. What is your vision for the City of Tuscaloosa in 10 years? How will you, in your role as an elected official, help make that vision a reality?

In ten years, I want Tuscaloosa to be the envy of the country. I want to see beautification, prosperity, and safety for all our citizens. I want our poorest person then to be much better off than they are today. I want to see more business, entertainment, and public spaces in our district. I want to see housing be much more affordable and gentrification become a thing of the past. I will do what needs to be done, using both orthodox and untested methods to make sure we get as close to this future as is physically possible.