

## **FCNC Candidate Questionnaire for Hannah LeGris, District 3 Candidate**

***1. Please describe your principal reasons for wanting to serve on the Council and your involvement with neighborhoods. What are the two highest-priority issues affecting neighborhoods in your district, and what solutions do you propose?***

I am running for Third District Council because I am invested in making Lexington more resilient and inclusive while keeping our residents safe and supported. As your council member, I want to build trust, cut through barriers that separate people, and find common ground to deliver real solutions so we can address the many challenges facing our society.

The most important issue facing our district is that in the coming months and years we will have to work to overcome a huge economic crisis and budgetary shortfall. While much of our work must focus on maintaining essential operations, it is imperative that we protect the investments that have already been made toward making our city more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable. That means being responsible stewards of our available resources, focusing on people-centric policies, and mindfully investing in the needs of all residents.

As a city we must also prioritize equitable investment in our neighborhoods and increase housing stock. If elected I will advocate for responsible development, with an emphasis on infill, block-by-block development, and opportunities for affordable housing. It is critical the city continues to create and fund opportunities for diversified investment and home ownership, both of which are critical for developing household wealth. In the process of managing our priorities, I am dedicated to listening to and working with stakeholders in the city, region, and state so that our present decisions do not compromise our future.

***2. Lexington has seen a significant need for affordable housing in recent years, especially for the most economically challenged; and the new 2020/21 budget proposes significant cuts in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund allocation and staffing. As Councilmember, what strategies would you offer for affordable housing?***

There is an urgent need for more housing options within the Urban Services Boundary, and we need to ensure that the Comprehensive and Master Housing plans are implemented and enforced humanely and responsibly. I support several steps that the city has already taken to address the issue of housing security, including creating an affordable housing plan and trust, which I would advocate to keep fully funded.

In 2015 the Fayette Alliance commissioned a housing survey, which informed the most recent Comprehensive Plan, and found that low-maintenance, evolving format housing (duplex, fourplex, condominiums, detached small homes) can help serve the growing community need. We must prioritize continued long-term planning and investment by the LFUCG to keep housing affordable. However the state constitution limits the ways through which city governments can raise money, and so we must take steps to increase and diversify the revenue stream.

If elected to council I will push to create more diversified mixed-income housing. Vice Mayor Kay has shared an opportunity for strategic investment through the Kentucky Housing Coalition and I support investigating this option. More generally, I believe the LFUCG should deliberately seek out grants, public/private partnerships, and federal subsidies to help incentivize affordable housing initiatives. Safe housing is a human right; therefore it is critical that we address this issue intelligently, inclusively, and respectfully for the benefit of everyone within the Lexington area.

***3. The novel coronavirus and resultant economic downturn has had a disproportionate impact on Lexington's most vulnerable communities. In this time of economic emergency, what are your priorities for social services and for workforce and small business recovery?***

It is critical that we continue to support the most vulnerable in our communities during this pandemic. Local and minority-owned businesses are the first and most deeply affected by economic recessions; even in the best of times, they need all the support we can give. During this economic crisis our top priority must be assisting in their survival and recovery. Any federal relief funds we receive should be directed accordingly, and I support strategic investment through small business grants and easing restrictions whenever feasible for local businesses.

We should also keep existing large-scale projects like the Civic Center on track and refocus our efforts to bring new business to the city. Furthermore, I believe we can also strengthen our relationships with large employers and continue to work with the legislative delegation to increase options for revenue generation, job creation, and economic growth in the Bluegrass.

I support restoring the cuts to our city's social services programs, and I want to create policies that direct people toward local service organizations, spotlight nonprofits, and advocate for national service volunteers like AmeriCorps. Given the current economic constraints it is critical that city government focus on maintaining essential operations, while strategically investing to safe-guard the health and safety of our entire community.

***4. What do you believe are the most critical needs and most effective avenues for improving public safety in your district and in the city as a whole?***

I am deeply disturbed and saddened by the recent deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. We as a society still have marked disparities in our governance and law enforcement, and people of color continue to be treated unequally. This must change immediately. During the course of this campaign, I have spoken with many members of our public safety community about social justice. I believe we have had good leadership in our police and fire departments for a number of years; the decreasing number of violent crimes over time are a testament to the hard work that has been done. However, there is still progress to be made and public safety is strongest and most effective when it is transparent and accountable. We need to create policies that reduce the racial disparity in policing and hold those who abuse the public trust to account.

Many public safety issues extend beyond a single district, which is why it is important to address the root causes of these issues. Social services and public health resources are critical to this process; it is crucial that we prioritize early interventions and wrap-around services whenever

possible to avoid the more dangerous situations when first responders and the public are thrown together under extreme duress. Public safety is the foundation of communal society and we must do everything we can to keep people out of harm's way.

***5. To what extent do you find Lexington's current zoning enforcement, code enforcement and building inspection adequate, and how would you propose to improve them? Do you support instituting rental licensing and inspection for Lexington in the near future?***

Lexington's city planning office does an excellent job overseeing and cataloguing ordinances and mandates from the Comprehensive Plan and through the city administration. However, zoning and code enforcement have been long-standing issues, and some real-estate developers take advantage of a system that is designed for the benefit and use of private home-owners. As a consequence, some groups game the system and bully poor home-owners through code-violation reports in order to acquire property through foreclosures or coercive methods. Practices like these disproportionately affect the elderly and people of color in our city, depriving them of an important asset in the development of household wealth. As a councilmember I will prioritize the public health and the safety of city residents, not penalize the poor; providing clear guidelines and judicious application of zoning standards can improve this process.

Rental licensing and inspection can also address some of these issues and I support creating expediting fees to increase city revenue for those who are willing to pay. Private rental units should be safe and follow the standards and character of the neighborhoods in which they are situated. City licensing may be one way of ensuring adequate enforcement for living spaces; however, due to the budget crises any new initiatives must be additive to the general fund. If elected, I will work with neighborhood associations, historic preservation, and city planners to penalize developers and rental groups that diminish the quality of neighborhoods, while prioritizing the creation of diversified housing options for residents.

***6. Council is currently reviewing an Accessory Dwelling Unit ZOTA, a change in the zoning ordinance to permit and regulate independent second dwellings, including units for rent, on single-family lots. Do you support the ordinance as currently proposed or in some other form? Do you find the proposed ADU zoning suitable for neighborhoods in your district? Should it be adopted city-wide or decided differently for different locations?***

The Third District is home to the best neighborhoods in Lexington and it is important that we protect their unique qualities while we continue the process of diversifying housing stock. ADUs have the potential to add additional dwelling space onto established properties, but this process must be carefully managed and regulated or it will result in further neighborhood deterioration and inequality. Key factors when we think about ADUs include (1) consistent enforcement of regulations (2) comprehensive design standards and (3) ensuring that occupancy standards are followed. If ADUs are implemented as directed, with a focus on maintaining public health and neighborhood standards, then they may provide a viable alternative. If they are implemented in a reckless, under-regulated, or haphazard way, then they will be a liability and only exacerbate existing housing problems.

Citizen participation is essential to this process and I support continued conversation about the means and methods of updating our housing ordinances, including the possibility of an incremental roll-out through zoning changes. ADUs have the potential to support the needs of our growing population and provide options for seniors and others who wish to age in place. But, as noted above, we as a city must improve our process to provide consistent inspection and enforcement of housing rules and owner-occupancy requirements. By using a qualitative- and data-based approach; through careful research and consideration, I believe we can learn from the mistakes of other cities to make a solution that works for Lexington while adequately planning for our future.

**7. Council is currently reviewing *business and revenue ordinances* to require registration, licensing, and hotel tax for short-term rentals like Airbnb. Do you support these ordinances? Do you recommend changing or adopting *zoning ordinances* at the same time, to allow short-term rentals in residential zones or restrict them?**

I supported the transient room tax passed by the city council; we need to recognize the role short-term rentals will play as commercial entities within our neighborhoods and regulate them accordingly. However, short-term rentals are not the same as hotels or motels and we should make considerations as a city to address the special challenges that they present in terms of taxation and regulation. It is paramount that we continue to enforce code regulations and neighborhood standards but, as I have previously stated, we need to improve our internal processes with zoning and code enforcement so that we can provide a more consistent standard for property-owners while increasing city revenues. As we consider additional changes to city ordinances, I will support the creation of a straight-forward regulation and taxation program for short-term rentals and a penalty system that disincentivizes poorly-maintained or disruptive units. With public input, and by advocating for responsible rental policies, LFUCG can encourage tourism and private industry within Lexington, while continuing to protect the quality of life that is so important to residents.

**8. *What are the priority transportation and mobility needs in your district, including those of motorists, bus riders, cyclists and walkers, and how would you meet them?***

I believe public transit should be a convenience, not a compromise. Lexington has a variety of transportation challenges, including poor ridership within the public transportation system, a municipal plan that favors unrestricted flow, and an increasing amount of private traffic, all of which diminish liveability within the city. As councilmember for the Third District, I will push to limit traffic in residential areas, create more opportunities for alternative transportation, and require infrastructure that is pedestrian and bicycle-oriented rather than simply car-centric. I am in favor of improving and expanding public transit overall in the LFUCG Metro region but a robust transit system requires useful routes, reliable schedules, and frequent service. I use Lextran occasionally, but it is usually easier for me to walk or ride my bicycle within the district rather than catch a bus, which is itself emblematic of the larger problem. Further demand for public transit may also increase if Council would consider limiting new development in certain high-traffic areas of town and creating commuter lines, rideshare, and park-and-ride programs to help curtail the use of private vehicles.

***9. How urgent or important today is historic preservation (HP) and protecting Lexington's historic places from demolition? What strategies would you recommend? Should the city restore funds for HP staffing and the studies required to identify both individual historic assets and districts that qualify for National Register listing, historic tax credits and local H-1 designation?***

Historic preservation is an important and often-overlooked program within the larger conversation about development. While not appropriate for all spaces, HP can simplify the process for maintaining and improving areas by providing clear guidelines for preserving the defining features of a district or neighborhood. In many cases HP helps to beautify our communities, as historical overlay zones create a predictable framework in which decisions about community appearance and unique buildings can be made. I support funding for HP within our city as a way to identify historically significant structures, assist in the preservation of certain neighborhoods, and help protect the distinctive buildings that set Lexington apart.

The benefits of urban densification are numerous and supported by many livability indices, and I believe the city has a responsibility to promote infill within the Urban Services Boundary whenever feasible. However, HP is another rubric that city planners and neighborhoods can use to facilitate responsible development. Whether providing absolute end-of-use rules for vacant structures, promoting holistic planning within neighborhoods, or limiting the construction of uncharacteristic buildings, HP can limit negligent or otherwise detrimental development, which can increase property values. Like all tools, HP overlays can be misused, which is why it's important to provide transparency throughout the application and review process to ensure that neighborhood decisions are fair and considered and ultimately beneficial to residents.

***10. What do you see as the environmental impact on our neighborhoods of an urban growth strategy focused on intensive infill and redevelopment? How do you assess our water and air quality, trees, greenspace, flood control, etc.) in this context?***

With global temperatures reaching dangerous levels, we need to take immediate action as a city and society to reduce our net carbon dioxide emissions. Whether reducing our carbon footprint through individual choices, promoting and incentivizing green development, maintaining and improving tree coverage, or expanding our recycling and composting initiatives, I want to create foundational policies that will reduce our environmental impact

Urban densification simplifies the creation and maintenance of infrastructure, is more energy efficient than rural development, and increases the value of the local economy. If elected, I will champion incentivizing the development of under-utilized space within the Urban Services Boundary, while focusing on mindful, regulated development within neighborhoods in order to maintain their essence. I also support rehabilitating historic structures whenever possible - preservation and sustainability are natural partners. It is important to recognize that new development can also be less environmentally impactful in certain circumstances. The city should further incentivize green building practices through state or federal programs such as LEED certification rebates or the EPA's green infrastructure development plan.

All development comes with a cost and unfortunately, our infrastructure has been inadequately addressed for years. These externalities must be built-in when planning for new development, rather than passed onto future generations. Functional water, gas, electricity, and sewer systems are necessary to responsibly manage our environmental impact, maintain a safe and healthy standard of living, and provide the basis for efficient and responsible growth.

***11. Do you find that the 2018 Comprehensive Plan policies and processes clearly, fairly and effectively guide decision making on zone changes and development plans for your District and for Lexington as a whole?***

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The Comprehensive Plan is a well-researched document, but unless it utilizes increased participation from a wider and more representative citizenry during implementation it will focus on short-sighted, developer-focused practices rather than resident needs and responsible growth. As a council member, I would clarify the primacy of inclusion, liveability, and sustainability within the zoning and planning process. In practice this might include an emphasis on:

1. Mixed use development
2. People-centric neighborhoods
3. Green development and sustainable practices
4. Limiting traffic
5. Protecting neighborhoods from disruptive development
6. Pedestrian infrastructure

An essential part of this plan is allowing planning staff to review needs/interests of the neighborhood prior to developers, so that decisions can be informed by constituents early and often. Development doesn't have to come at the expense of character or preservation. If elected to council, I will work with neighborhood groups in the Third District to help them determine how they fit into the Comprehensive Plan. The council should work with the Mayor's office to simplify and empower the enforcement of existing codes and standards and take steps to penalize repeat offenders who abuse the zoning system. The LFUCG can facilitate conversations between developers and the neighborhoods by applying zoning standards more fairly and consistently, making the process less antagonistic. And if that interaction can be driven by values and comprehensible policies instead of profit, all the better.

***12. What or where, in your view, are the "downtown" and "corridors" in Lexington most suited for intensive growth and development, within your District, and in the urban county as a whole? Similarly where is there "underutilized land" that would be most suitable for development? More generally, what are your land-use priorities for the neighborhoods in your district? What development is missing, and what is to be protected?***

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Unconstrained growth is not a neutral force and I believe the city should use the Comprehensive Plan, zoning/code enforcement, and tax incentives to manage development in a manner that is sustainable, equitable to the larger community, and appropriate for our needs. Several surveys cataloguing underutilized properties within the Urban Services Boundary have been widely

shared and residents should also work with city planning staff directly to identify abandoned or neglected properties in their neighborhoods that can be flagged.

The downtown district has been the focus of a prolonged municipal beautification program and the proliferation of businesses, public events, bike/ped traffic, and overall growth is a testament to the foresight of city planners. I support continued investment in projects like the Town Branch Commons because we as city leaders must prioritize inclusiveness, sustainability, and healthy-outcomes during our planning process.

Our corridor model has been helpful for developing farms and unimproved land, but we have to continue to prioritize small, local businesses not only during this budget shortfall but also as a long-term strategy for improving neighborhoods and the local economy. Lexington's infrastructure is becoming overstressed due to rapid outward expansion and I support micro-development and precise zoning updates on a block-by-block basis as a strategy to help manage traffic and infrastructure concerns, while also encouraging infill as a means of economic development. As Third District council member I will encourage more residents to share their voices within neighborhood plans to ensure that our policies remain people-centric and prioritize liveability.

***13. What is your vision for preserving the integrity and character of our urban neighborhoods even as we protect Lexington's signature rural area?***

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One of the best aspects of Lexington and Fayette County is the balance of urban and rural spaces. In order to preserve the personality of our neighborhoods we must continue to promote civic engagement and education, while transparently and responsibly administering our city. The LFUCG should continue to promote and empower neighborhoods as the bedrock of community development as we increase efforts to include disenfranchised or under-represented groups in the conversation.

Municipal areas, however, are only part of the discussion, and I support maintaining the Urban Services Boundary to preserve both the urban and rural communities that make Lexington beautiful and unique. Working horse farms are a key part of the Bluegrass identity, while horticultural farms are vital to our local food system, improving our health, decreasing our carbon footprint, and diversifying our economy, all while increasing recovery during crises or disruptions.

Lexington is already a hub of commerce, education, diversity, and the arts within Central Kentucky. I believe that with considerate planning and leadership, we can survive this turbulent and difficult time to become greener, safer, more diversified, and resilient as a community. We are all connected; during times of disaster and unrest, we rely on each other and our community institutions more than ever. As your council member I want to build trust, communicate transparently, and find common ground so that we can deliver pragmatic solutions that will serve our community today, tomorrow, and beyond.

***14. What key issues do you identify in revenue, expenditures, bonding, tax incentives, etc. in light of a long-term trend of LFUCG expenditures growing faster than revenue? What avenues for achieving a better balance look most promising considering not only the current economic crisis but thereafter?***

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This is an incredibly challenging time for our city with no easy answers. It is critical that we support vulnerable populations and local businesses within our community, maintain the essential functions of government, and avail ourselves of any and every state and federal resource to minimize the negative impact to residents. I believe that supporting local businesses remains the best strategy for sustainable long-term growth. However, Lexington already had a budget shortfall prior to COVID-19 in part because of unfulfilled predictions about payroll taxation. Due to limitations within the State constitution the city only has so many ways to raise revenue. Given our heavy reliance on payroll taxes, it is imperative that our city remain competitive in attracting responsible industries in order to maintain our financial health.

I support participatory budgeting as a means of ensuring that citizens have an increased say in how, where, and why we allocate certain funds, increasing input and transparency throughout that process. It is equally important that city leaders work with the State legislative delegation in order to expand Lexington's financial options. Whatever decisions the current administration arrives at, we must utilize our values of compassion, inclusion, and people-centered decision making to inform our planning process. We may not have foreseen the current crisis, but I believe through creative and compassionate leadership we can rise to the challenges of the present and work together as we move forward towards a more just, equitable, and sustainable future.