

2020 COLUMBIA CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Pat Fowler responses

May 7, 2020

- Age - 60
- Occupation – business manager for small construction company
- Educational background, including any degrees earned and where you earned them – graduate of Parkdale Sr. High School, Riverdale MD (1977), graduate of Frostburg State College, Frostburg MD, BA in Political Science and Social Science (1981), graduate of Suffolk University Law School, JD (1984)
- The url(s) of any campaign website or campaign social media presence(s) you may have
Our campaign is on Facebook @PatFowler4FirstWard
- Other relevant background information, such as community service, volunteer efforts, organizational memberships, or awards/recognitions. Please see attached document of community service, education, and awards.

1. How would you describe your leadership style?

Collaborative. The job of a First Ward Council Person is to first listen to the people of the First Ward, ask questions, do some homework and study the issue, and then amplify the requests of the First Ward constituents we represent, regardless of whether they are homeowners or renters, businesses owners or residents. Students and our colleges are an economic engine for our community. Their concerns and requests as residents and consumers are important to our overall quality of life.

2. The city has several ongoing affordable housing programs and is working with the Columbia Community Land Trust to develop small amounts of affordable housing in the central city. What more do you think the city can and should do to increase the availability of affordable housing for low- to moderate-income residents?

I am saddened by the challenges we face in the First Ward with many of our lower-income residents being pushed out into the far reaches of the city because of the lack of affordable housing here. This means people who most need services are further away from those services and exacerbates the transportation challenges for the most vulnerable among us. The First Ward is home to the city's largest inventory of affordable housing, some of it in need of upgrades to make us resilient and forward thinking where climate action and adaptation efforts are concerned. Imagine how we could lower our carbon footprint if we restore and refurbish the central city housing stock we have now instead of demolishing, transporting and burying it in the landfill only to release even more CO2 into the atmosphere by trucking newly manufactured materials to a house lot and building anew.

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3. The Columbia Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council continue to wrestle with how to regulate short-term rentals such as those advertised through Airbnb. What do you think should be the primary components of a comprehensive short-term rental ordinance?

The short-term rental industry has been met with push back as communities stand up for the inventory of affordable housing they have and do not want to lose to investors buying up properties and hollowing out neighborhoods. There is a demand for short-term rentals in Columbia (full disclosure: I stay in owner-hosted STRs when I travel) and EQUITY demands that we allow them, with the same permissions and constraints, equally, in all neighborhoods regardless of zoning category. If we wish to limit, or enable, non-owner-hosted, we must limit or enable them equally in all residential zoning categories. When any Columbian enters their house or apartment, the quality of their quiet enjoyment of their home is equally valuable as the quiet enjoyment of other neighbors and neighborhoods.

4. Columbia recorded 12 firearm homicides last year, the most since 2001. This included a period in September during which five gun-related deaths occurred in only 10 days. What more do you think police – and the community – can do to curb this violence?

Since its founding in late 2019, I have been a member of Boone County Community Against Violence. Sitting among families who have lost their loved ones, I have learned to listen more and talk less. Let us together ask the families who have lost loved ones to gun violence to tell us what they believe would make a difference. Families have been turning this over in their heads, trying to find solutions, from the moment they received word of the death of their child, Mom, Dad, sister, brother, niece, nephew, or neighbor. I trust the advice of the families. Create the venue they feel most comfortable with to share their concerns, their ideas, their experiences. From those conversations we will see our next steps more clearly. Then we must act as we have been informed.

5. The city has undertaken several central-city sanitary sewer projects in recent months. Are you satisfied with the progress the sewer utility is making in replacing and repairing sewer lines in the central city, and where do you think the remaining priorities lie?

The list of deferred sanitary and storm sewer projects is long. My priority is a recitation of how long and how expensive the list is. Manageable chunks are a strategy for implementation but not long-range planning. We want to understand the enormity of the task. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) represents a perplexing set of conditions. How does a project get on the CIP? How does it stay on the CIP? Under what circumstances does it roll off the CIP? How does a project become part of a bond that goes to the voters? How many projects listed within the First Ward benefit the city as a whole? After you factor city-wide projects out, what projects benefit the people who live, or own a business, in the First Ward? Are projects in the First Ward equitably funded?

6. Despite what appears to be community consensus about the importance of a reliable public transportation system in Columbia, the City Council has continued to cut back on bus service and has struggled to find a successful model. What are your ideas for establishing a fiscally sound and reliable public transportation service?

Treat bus service generally, and specifically Go COMO Transit, as economic development for the employees, the employers, and the customers who would ride a robust transit system every day to get to work, to school, the doctor, shopping, for recreation, back and forth from Columbia Regional Airport. If we were willing to give transit as much attention as the airport expansion, also an important economic development engine, we would be closer to providing a system that works for all of us, regardless of our socioeconomic status.

7. The City Council in June 2019 passed the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, which established the goal of reaching 100% clean, renewable energy in the city by 2035. What do you believe is the best course of action to achieve that goal?

First I am proud of the City of Columbia for taking a stand to slow climate change when our national leadership chose to pull out of the Kyoto Treaty and the Paris Agreement, putting our planet and its inhabitants in greater peril. Climate change has a disproportionate impact on our most vulnerable residents. Council's ability to adopt ordinances and establish policies to implement the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, including its renewable energy goals, is dependent upon the support of its ratepayers. Are the city employees, at the direction of their supervisors, out there encouraging or discouraging the conversation? It makes the difference. Are we applying that kind of social norming and peer pressure that our young people employ so well as a strategy to getting wide community buy in? The outcome pivots on how genuinely we are committed to it.

8. The city is seeking proposals from firms to conduct a performance audit of city finances. Do you support a performance audit and, if so, which areas of city finances do you think should be scrutinized first?

City Manager John Glascock has proposed starting with the Finance Department because the services they provide to the other departments are the central core of how we manage our city spending. Water & Light should be next because it generates the largest amount of revenue each month and has, reportedly, absorbed the costs of providing a wide range of services to the city's various departments for years. If we are truly interested in how we spend our city funds equitably, efficiently, economically, and effectively, we can benefit from a rigorous performance audit and the scrutiny of our citizens at each milestone step. I joined the ongoing efforts to advocate for the Performance Audit in August of 2018. Dedicated citizens continue to push for its effective undertaking and reporting of results.

9. The city and county Planning and Zoning Commissions are in the early stages of establishing a West Area Plan that would guide development of a nearly 30-square-mile area west of the city limits. What obstacles/issues do you believe need to be addressed as part of that plan?

As a member of the Boone County Planning and Zoning Commission I participated in the drafting of the Northeast Columbia Area Plan. From 2008-2009, the combined City and County Planning Commissions wrestled with the challenges of anticipating development surrounding the location of the new high school which opened in 2013. We did not anticipate the ability of an important stakeholder to leave the neighborhood in limbo over whether the students would be permitted to leave campus at lunch time. A closed campus at lunch would slow the siting of fast food restaurants in the area, an open campus at lunch would accelerate the siting of fast food restaurants. These kinds of unexpected impacts affect the CATSO planning processes, road spending and infrastructure needs. Lessons learned: 1) plans are compromise documents, 2) willingness matters and 3) if you want the plan to have lasting impact translate its objectives into ordinances.

10. What priorities specific to your ward, not covered by the previous questions, would you pursue if elected to the council?

Columbia overall and the First Ward specifically have a high number of its residents working in jobs below the pay level and responsibility that their experience, capacity, and training would otherwise command. As an engine of economic development, and to free up more entry level positions for persons entering the workforce for the first time, I would emphasize the role of REDI and every city line of spending to ensure that our combined human capabilities and talents have the best chance to be employed, and utilized, to their full potential, their highest and best use. We can lift our First Ward, low-income, workers up with better pay and jobs that align to their skills and experience.

11. What is your assessment of the city's response thus far to the COVID-19 pandemic, and what do you believe are the best strategies going forward for dealing with the revenue and budgeting challenges the virus presents?

I attended the May 4th and May 18th Council meetings. We've seen an impressive amount of collaborative work happen quickly with funding through CoMoHelps followed by federal and state government. I support Director Browning's public health decisions. The City is reviewing the revenue shortfall now. They plan to access surplus funds in the interim to meet critical needs. I support the Mayor's insistence that we complete the first phase of the Performance Audit, scheduled for this Fall, before we consider changing the rate structure for utilities and fees. I also support a mid-course correction to ensure that federal and state funds are distributed equitably, including for the needs of the unsheltered homeless in our community. Some small businesses report they were not eligible for assistance or were left waiting in the queue. Let's find out. Council Member Pitzer suggested a utility rebate across the board to ease financial burdens. Instead, I support focusing on families who would benefit the most.