The Asheville Downtown Association periodically surveys its members and the community to get feedback on issues and challenges facing downtown. We’ll utilize this feedback to formulate the questions included in this survey.

The top issues noted in the survey for maintaining the vibrancy of downtown are: supporting local businesses, safety, more parking/transportation options, maintenance of infrastructure, addressing homelessness and affordable/workforce housing.

**Downtown Issues Questionnaire for Asheville City Council Candidates**

**YOUR NAME**  Adrian Vassallo

**QUESTION:** Please tell us why you are running for City Council.

- I’ve spent the last 12 years working with a variety of organizations in Asheville (Downtown Association, Downtown Commission, WCQS, United Way, Southern Conference Basketball Tournament, HUB Alliance, Eblen, Eliada, MANNA, and Trinity Episcopal). I’ve seen the needs in our community and worked on solutions. I now feel I have the skill set and requisite experience to step up and serve our broader community.

**QUESTION:** What do you feel are downtown’s most pressing challenges?

- Over the last 30+ years, the Downtown landscape has changed quite a bit. However, we are still not done! The challenges we face in Downtown are how to grow in smart and livable ways and encourage development that focuses on density and mixed use. We are just starting to see the beginnings of a much larger residential trend and this is great. But we also need to balance this with supporting our small business community that has made Downtown unique. By fixing our infrastructure and working with developers, we can grow our Downtown in the right ways and make it a place for all of us.

**QUESTION:** What is the role of downtown in the greater Asheville community?

- Downtown continues to be a place of connectivity and commerce for our region. It is where the bulk of our community services are located, where many large and small businesses reside, and where we come together as community. We need to one in on the ways we can support the culture of downtown, preserve and grow local businesses, and ensure downtown is a destination for locals.

**QUESTION:** What smart growth strategies and funding mechanisms would you employ to support thoughtful growth in downtown that increases the city's tax base while also maintaining its character?
They City should be sitting down with developers much earlier in the process as a partner, not just as a code or design reviewer. There have already been so many lost opportunities to work with developers to address infrastructure and parking needs. I would advocate for policies that encourage density and mixed use, while also supporting affordability for residents and the small business community.

ISSUE: Supporting local business
QUESTION: What strategies would you employ to ensure the sustainability of small locally owned businesses in downtown?

That conversation began when I was Chair of the Downtown Commission. While we are constrained legally to implement restrictive policies, we can be more creative on the things we can do. Supporting small business growth and expansion through grants and tax incentives is a start and something easy and small to do. However, we can think bigger and look at Land Trusts for Downtown that would keep commercial spaces more affordable. I will be a voice on Council for our City’s Economic Development office to focus on the needs of our small business community.

ISSUE: Parking/Transportation
QUESTION: What improvements to our parking, transit system and alternative transportation options would you advocate for to ease pressure on the parking system?

I’ve been a tireless advocate for our parking issues in Downtown. It’s time that we put new leadership in place that will plan for our infrastructure needs. We’ve done too many studies with no action on the current parking problems. Our City should have been a partner in many of the recent apartment and hotel projects to create additional parking throughout Downtown. Furthermore, the idea of a Downtown Circulator has been “circulating” since the 90s. Let’s just do it.

ISSUE: Safety
QUESTION: How would you work with the police department to ensure adequate resources to maintain public safety? What strategies would you employ to address the concerns regarding policing brought forth during the recent budget conversation?

We cannot continue to demand that our Officers do more with less. The Downtown Patrol Unit is still not 24/7 staffed and their workload is increasing. The budget increase was also tied to adding the River Arts District to their district, yet City leadership and staff did not communicate that to the community. As part of my Back to Basics platform, we need to focus on the delivery of core City services and policing is one of the priorities. That does not mean that we should continue to do things the old way. We can train our officers better and have a proactive approach to address equity throughout our community.

ISSUE: Infrastructure
QUESTION: Identify your top three downtown infrastructure needs. How would you prioritize funding for these projects and how do you feel infrastructure impacts business success?

1) Streets and Sidewalks 2) Parking 3) Electrical (Distribution and Lighting)

We have to focus on these critical elements for our Downtown. There was very little funding in the bond referendum for Downtown and our current Capital Projects budget
doesn’t even address issues like the sidewalks on Lexington Avenue. I will demand that our City staff readdress the Capital Projects budget and develop a 5 year plan that fixes the problems already identified in our Downtown and plan for the growth that is continuing. By not fixing basic issues like broken sidewalks and horrible streets, we hurt the small business community. This is how customers get to their businesses! If we aren’t helping to facilitate that, we may as well be closing the doors for them.

**ISSUE:** Homelessness  
**QUESTION:** What steps would you take to support the Homeless Initiative Advisory Committee’s 5-year plan released earlier this year? What other strategies or initiatives would you consider to address homelessness in our community?

- The 5 year plan was very comprehensive and was unanimously accepted by City Council and County Commission. Many of the recommendations will be worked on at the staff and committee level and will take collaboration across the community. I’ve personally worked with several groups, like Homeward Bound and the United Way, and would continue to support their efforts with the new strategies. There are no other strategies that I could personally provide. HIAC was made up of multiple people in our community that are addressing homelessness on the front lines. I am positive that they did a thorough and great job on this strategic plan!

**ISSUE:** Affordable/Workforce Housing  
**QUESTION:** What is your position on housing diversity in downtown? How would you direct staff to utilize funds from the recently passed Affordable Housing Bond? What other strategies would you like to see our city develop to address the affordability issue?

- We are on the cusp of a new development trend of residential units in Downtown. Many of these are apartments, not second homes, and will greatly change the day-to-day landscape of people living and working in Downtown. However, very few of these have incorporated affordable housing units in them. With the bond funds available, our City should be purchasing land and partnering with developers to create mixed use projects that have truly affordable units integrated into the project.

What is your 5-year vision for Downtown?

- We cannot forget that Downtown is for us first as a community. We have to be smart about its development and future. By encouraging density and mixed use, we can continue to grow Downtown into the center of commerce and community. Areas like the South Slope and West Patton are still ripe with opportunity for these projects and all of this works together to create livable, walkable communities that also support small business!

Any further comments you’d like to include concerning Downtown Asheville?

- No other candidate has worked as tirelessly for Downtown as I have. We have so much opportunity ahead of us and I will continue to be an advocate for how we grow smartly and support our vibrant Downtown.