The Asheville Downtown Association periodically surveys its members and the community to get feedback on issues and challenges facing downtown.

The top issues identified by members to maintain the vibrancy of downtown are: more parking/transportation options, supporting local businesses, maintenance of infrastructure, safety, addressing homelessness, and affordable/workforce housing.

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

**YOUR NAME:** Kristen Goldsmith

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

I’m running for City Council because many folks see their ability to remain in Asheville rapidly slipping away. Our housing costs are skyrocketing. Wages remain stagnant, and people are having to move farther out into the County or scrambling to find more roommates to afford a place to live. All the while we see the combined impacts of tourism and lack of affordability place an increasing strain on our infrastructure and ecology.

I hold a Master’s in sustainable architecture, and I practiced for 10 years until the Great Recession. Since then I’ve been a shift worker, and, living in Asheville, I’ve struggled with issues of affordability and transportation.

This combination of training and lived experience makes me uniquely suited to stand up to the challenges Asheville faces in the coming years. Especially in the downtown, we’re going to confront difficult questions about development, growth, and affordability. As a former architect I have the expertise to ask the hard questions of developers, and as one of the thousands of shift workers in our city, my motivation is to make sure that new development has our residents’ interests at heart.

I’m running for City Council because I will be a voice for the everyday people who live and work here by focusing on policies that will keep Asheville livable, including more affordable housing, fare-free public transit, more alternative means of transportation, and living wage jobs. I will prioritize sustainable development and policies that will bring more equity to our city.

**QUESTION:** What do you feel is downtown’s most pressing challenge, and how would you address it?
Our downtown has been overwhelmed with hotel development. This is problematic for several reasons. First, it’s putting all of our economic eggs in one low-wage basket. Hotels are among the least likely businesses to pay a living wage—currently there is only one hotel that is living wage certified. Second, a monolithic focus on tourism development is vulnerable to recession and puts a significant strain on our infrastructure, including streets, sidewalks, and water systems. Lastly, overdeveloping with hotels is part of a broader affordability threat downtown. This is not only putting housing downtown out of reach for Ashevillians, but it’s squeezing out the local, small businesses that make Asheville a unique place that people want to visit. Like local renters, small business owners cannot afford the skyrocketing costs of rent and are being pushed toward extinction.

To begin addressing this problem we need to overhaul our land use policies to bring a more diverse set of uses back to downtown. This includes building and maintaining affordable office and residential spaces. People who work downtown should be able to afford to live downtown. Additionally, the city can incentivize local landlords via property tax credits to adopt fairer, affordable leasing terms to stabilize rental costs. Second, we need a downtown circulator bus, which would allow people to move around downtown without a car, alleviating congestion and parking issues. Finally, to address accessibly and sustainability, we need to bring greenspaces back into our downtown, along with pedestrian-only spaces.

**QUESTION:** What smart growth strategies and funding mechanisms would you advocate for to support thoughtful growth in downtown that increases the city's tax base while also maintaining its character?

We need to overhaul our Uniform Development Ordinance to include land use policies that will bring a more diverse set of uses back to downtown. We need to limit future hotel development in favor of office space, small business spaces, live-work spaces, and affordable housing. In addition to re-writing our zoning policies, we can use a variety of tools including land use incentive grants, fee rebates, and develop city-owned land for these purposes.

**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?

We need to work towards significantly reducing the number of cars downtown. We can do this in a number of ways:

First, the City of Asheville should partner with Buncombe County to fund fare-free public transit, including park and ride facilities for those who live outside the city limits but work in Asheville. This allows us to pool our resources with the County, it will take cars off the road, reduce the congestion and strain on our infrastructure, and reduce local carbon emissions. This benefits all of Asheville’s workers by providing them with cost-free, reliable transportation, and enables economic mobility by providing access to more jobs.
Second, I would propose the creation of a downtown circulator, pedestrian-only zones, and more bike and green infrastructure downtown. Together, these amenities would significantly ease pressure on our parking system because people would no longer require a car to move around downtown. Additionally, the increased bike and green infrastructure will enable folks to navigate downtown safely and efficiently, while having a positive economic and environmental impact.

**ISSUE: Supporting local business**

**QUESTION:** What strategies would you employ to ensure the sustainability of small locally owned businesses in downtown?

First, the City should consider purchasing more spaces downtown for the development of affordable business space. Second, the city can incentivize local landlords via property tax credits to adopt fairer, affordable leasing terms to stabilize rental costs. Third, as part of an overhaul to our Uniform Development Ordinance, the City should incorporate affordable office space and live-work spaces in the requirements for mixed-use design.

Finally, curtailing the development of new hotels will also benefit locally owned businesses by freeing up, or at least preserving available business space. We’re constantly being told that the only way to make a space viable or to preserve historic buildings is to turn them into hotels. As a former architect, I know that isn’t true. A diverse mix of uses is key to sustainable development and long-term viability.

**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?

One of our biggest infrastructure needs is a fare-free public transit system. This will benefit the county, the city, and the downtown as more people to come downtown to work, shop, and visit. Second, we need to increase our bike infrastructure as an alternative way for folks to move around downtown without having to rely on a car for short trips. This would have the additional benefit of removing cars from the roads and parking lots downtown. Additionally, studies show that individuals using bikes are more likely than drivers to frequent small, local businesses along their commute because they’re more likely to notice the business and because it’s easier to stop and ‘park’ on a bike than in a car. Third, I want to prioritize increased greenspace downtown to provide areas of refuge for those who live, work, and visit. These are places to meet friends, share lunch, play, and rest. Greenspaces also remove carbon from the air and reduce the heat island effect in areas with significant amounts of pavement.

**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 ensure community trust in policing?
We need to establish a Crisis Intervention task force—separate from law enforcement—that is specifically trained to respond in a compassionate manner to our neighbors struggling with homelessness, addiction, and mental health issues. These teams should be comprised of a mental health specialist and a registered nurse or EMT, and dispatched through the call center for cases involving homelessness, drug addiction, or mental health.

Currently, our law enforcement officers and first responders are the only personnel available to respond to these types of calls, and they do not have adequate training in these areas. It’s also a poor use of our city’s resources because it prevents them from responding to other emergencies.

By demonstrating our commitment to handling issues requiring social services with compassion, not law enforcement, we will build trust in our community, reduce incarceration rates for non-violent issues, and preserve city resources.

**ISSUE:** Homelessness

**QUESTION:** What steps would you take to support the Homeless Initiative Advisory Committee and Asheville’s homeless resource providers? What other strategies or initiatives would you consider to address homelessness in our community?

We need to employ a Housing First model to get folks off the streets and provide them with the services they need. Research shows that a housing first approach provides folks with the best opportunity to succeed, by addressing the most severe and basic need first, and providing access to additional services through that pathway. This will require us to invest heavily in transitional housing units, with access to services such as job training, housing preparedness, addiction treatment, and mental health services. The City of Asheville should partner with the Dogwood Health Alliance and Mission Health to provide these services.

**ISSUE:** Affordable/Workforce Housing

**QUESTION:** What is your position on housing diversity in downtown? What other strategies would you like to see our city develop to address the affordability issue?

I firmly believe that if you work in Asheville, you should be able to afford to live in Asheville, including downtown. We need to invest in affordable housing at all income levels and prioritize mixed-income housing development. We can achieve this by overhauling our UDO to establish guidelines about the types of development permitted in our neighborhoods. Our downtown should be a gathering place for locals and visitors alike, and in order to achieve this, we need to bring locals back downtown.

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