

Questionnaire for Candidates for Burlington Mayor and City Council, General Election, November 4, 2025

Beth Kennett	Ronnie K. Wall	Questions	Ian Baltutis	Harold Owen	Jeffrey Smythe	Donna M. Vanhook
1. Too high; increases were substantial and a hardship for many; and too low due to poor planning, the increases are not enough to meet the need. 1a. No response.	1. About right. 1a. \$0.4836.	Tax rate, spending, fund balance 1. Is Burlington's tax rate too high, too low, or about right? 1a. At what level (cents per \$100 valuation) should the city's tax rate be set? [FOR QUESTION 2, SEE PAGE 15]	1. Too high. 1a. The rate should be set only after a thorough budget review to eliminate waste and ensure the city is operating efficiently. It must be based on a responsible process, not promises.	1. About right. 1a. .48 to .52	1. About right. 1a. No response.	1. About right. 1a. No response.
3. Unfortunately, our city leadership has been reactionary rather than planning adequately. As a result, bond referendums were approved that are not adequate to cover what they were designed to cover. We will need to explore various avenues of planning and fund-development.	3. Yes, the voters approved the general obligation bond packages in 2024. It could increase the tax rate by 5%.	3. In 2024, Burlington voters approved two bond referendum packages – one for parks and recreation (\$47 million) and another for street and sidewalk improvements (\$21.5 million). The estimated financial impact on property owners from the two ballot questions was estimated at the time to be an increased annual tax bill of \$57.00 per \$100,000 valuation. What, if anything, can or should be done to reduce, or offset, this increased tax impact on homeowners and other property owners? [50 word limit]	3. The current council failed to explore all funding options. We must use a full suite of financial tools to spread costs over the life of these assets and align them with the future tax base that benefits. Combined with federal grants and a data-driven CIP, we can protect current taxpayers.	3. Ensure that: 1. Project costs remain within the approved budget. 2. The project scope does not expand beyond the original goals. 3. Timelines are maintained to avoid potential cost increases due to inflation or delays. City staff should provide monthly reports to the city council detailing financial status, project timelines, and any proposed scope changes.	3. Careful supervision of construction to avoid cost escalations, additional business development to increase overall tax income from existing property and sales taxes.	3. It is a lot of monies I do not think residents bargained for or the council planned for appropriately; at this time, I am [not] sure what can be done but may have some input while in office.
3a. No.	3a. I would oppose a 5% increase, but some kind of tax increase will be required to fulfill the bonds.	3a. Will you support whatever property tax rate increases are necessary to implement these bond issues?	3a. No.	3a. Yes.	3a. Yes. The people voted and the city must pay our debts.	3a. No.
4. I don't anticipate new bonds in the next 2 years I will assure we don't impose "whatever" tax increases but be fiscally responsible.	4. None.	4. What, if any, additional issues do you anticipate will need to be put before voters in a bond referendum during your term? [25 word limit]	4. None. The city must first prove it can responsibly manage the current bonds. Any future referendums must be guided by a comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan.	4. Expand water and sewer infrastructure to support economic growth, leading to increased job opportunities and a stronger tax base.	4. None. I will evaluate any proposals that are presented and respect the right of the people to vote for action.	4. No response.
5. Support.	5. Oppose.	Council terms, elections 5. In some N.C. cities, city council races are held based on geographic areas or districts, often referred to as "wards," within the city. Would you support or oppose a move toward city council elections based on ward, or district, representation?	5. Support.	5. Oppose.	5. Oppose. Our existing system works well.	5. Support.
6. No response.	6. Oppose.	6. In some N.C. cities, city council and mayoral candidates run for office on a partisan basis, rather than, as in Burlington, on a non-partisan basis. Would you support or oppose a move toward elections in Burlington based on political party?	6. Oppose.	6. Oppose.	6. Oppose.	6. Support.
7. Yes.	7. No.	7. Would you favor expanding the number of members on the city council?	7. Yes.	7. Yes.	7. No.	7. Yes.
7a. 6 council + Mayor.	7a. N.A.	7a. If so, to what number?	7a. 7 (including the Mayor).	7a. 7.	7a. N.A.	7a. 7.
8. The priority is to serve in the non-partisan elected capacity. That does not mean that one would need to revoke their political affiliation. Municipal issues are nonpartisan; creating safe and livable communities requires working together across divides to achieve this goal.	8. We should not engage in partisan political issues. Partisan political issues and elections have no place in our city elections.	8. As a member of a non-partisan city council, how much, if at all, do you believe you should become involved in partisan elections and/or partisan political issues? [50 word limit]	8. My primary responsibility is to all Burlington residents, not a political party. However, effective local leadership requires advocating for our city's interests in Raleigh and Washington. I will weigh in on partisan issues when they directly impact Burlington's funding, infrastructure, and ability to deliver essential services.	8. As a member of a nonpartisan council, I do not participate in partisan politics at the local, state, or federal level. However, I do take the time to educate myself on candidates' platforms in partisan races so I can make informed voting decisions.	8. In NC I have been unaffiliated and choose to stay that way. As a council, we should not be involved. As a citizen, I may privately support the candidates of my choosing. I should not use my position to amplify my voice.	8. Not at all.
9. No. Burlington has non-discrimination policies in place, we need to live by them.	9. No. The North Carolina Equal Employment Act addresses discrimination.	Policy Issues 9. Some North Carolina cities have adopted ordinances in recent years that seek to ban discrimination within their jurisdictions based on sexual orientation (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people) in public accommodations and employment. Does Burlington need such an ordinance?	9. Yes.	9. No.	9. No. State and US constitution protects these rights.	9. No.
9a. For.	9a. Against.	9a. Would you vote for or against such an ordinance?	9a. For.	9a. For.	9a. Against.	9a. Against.
10. Support.	10. Support.	10. In general, do you support or oppose using taxpayer money as an incentive to attract industry to Burlington?	10. Support.	10. Support.	10. Support-within guidelines.	10. Support.
10a. Support.	10a. Support.	10a. In general, do you support or oppose using taxpayer money as an incentive to keep existing industries in Burlington?	10a. Support.	10a. Support.	10a. Support within guidelines	10a. No response.
10b. I would support utilizing tax incentives that benefit the residents of Burlington. When you develop a strategic plan incentives can be helpful but when incentives are offered we must hold industry accountable by requiring a living wage and full time employment opportunities.	10b. Incentives that create value, such as revenue growth, additional jobs, and higher wages. Grants from state and federal sources can also provide incentives.	10b. If support (for either #10 or 10a), what types of incentive(s) would you advocate? [50 words or less]	10b. My focus is on incentives that create lasting public value. This means leveraging city investments in public infrastructure, roads, water, sewer, and safety, to support growth. I also support performance-based tax rebates, which provide a tangible return to taxpayers and are only granted after a company meets its job promises.	10b. The incentive amount should be determined by the level of private investment in the project and the number of new jobs created within one to five years of beginning operations. For existing businesses, I support financial incentives for facility expansions that result in new job creation and an increase in the property tax base.	10b. Limited reductions in sales tax and property tax that have clear ending dates, only when the business meets set employment benchmarks.	10b. We need to improve infrastructure to attract new industries. East Burlington is lacking decades of infrastructure improvements to attract healthy amenities. To address food insecurity a city-managed grocery store may be an option.
11. We have a public transit system that is providing a needed resource for our community. We must create a plan with goals for use and regular assessment on utilization and accessibility in relation to use and need in the community.	11. Good ridership growth and being consistent with serving a particular segment of the population. The bus system fills a void for those who don't have transportation.	11. How do you assess the operation of Burlington's bus system? [50 word limit]	11. The system provides an essential service but is inefficient with long wait times. I propose integrating our system with ACTA's, leveraging the new NCDOT on-demand transit grant funding. This creates a more efficient, seamless network, improving service for more people while maximizing the value of tax dollars.	11. The Link Transit system has proven to be a successful and affordable transportation option. Since its launch in 2016, ridership has grown from approximately 49,000 to 137,000 in 2024.	11. Adequate. The system has added sidewalks in many places using mostly federal tax money and allows folks without a vehicle safer access to work, food and medicine.	11. Improvements are being discussed like a substation in East Burlington. Some stops could use a shelter. A resident at Beaumont Apartments recently shared with me a need for a shelter there. I have heard some people mention wait time as a challenge. Hopefully, the new county ACTA services will help with appointments.
11a. Increase awareness and use of the system. We have this resource; we must promote and use it and work for outside grants to maintain it.	11a US DOT pays 80% of all local capital costs; operation costs are split 50-50 between the federal/local governments. Without this support, the bus system would not exist.	11a. Specifically, how is the bus system going to be financially sustainable in the long term? [25 word limit]	11a. Long-term sustainability comes from replacing costly, under-used fixed routes with flexible, grant-funded on-demand service. This better matches resources to actual ridership, lowering per-rider costs.	11a. Eighty percent of the system's capital expenses are funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation, with the state and city each contributing 10%.	11a. I don't currently know enough about the system to provide an effective answer.	11a. I think this is now under consideration and I reserve comment until I further research the topic.

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12. Create partnerships with public and private entities for varied housing types and multi-use structures and communities. Partner with the Burlington Community Land Trust. Convert vacant commercial spaces into affordable living spaces.	12. We should focus on Public, Private, and Partnership initiatives to address affordable housing needs. The city currently appropriates the federal dollars it receives for private investment to developers-for example, Community Development Block Grants and Home Funds. I am not in favor of using property tax dollars for affordable housing.	12. What, if anything, can the city do to encourage “affordable housing”? [50-word limit]	12. The city’s most effective role is to reduce regulatory barriers that drive up costs. By reforming our outdated zoning code and cutting red tape, we can encourage the market to build a wider variety of housing options, increasing the overall supply and creating more attainable homes for our workforce.	12. Each year, Burlington applies for federal housing grants, which are combined with private investment to support the development of affordable single-family and multi-family housing. The Burlington City Council has approved the Unified Development Ordinances to promote affordable housing, including provisions that allow for higher-density development.	12. Apply the current ordinances in a meaningful way, approve projects that included a range of unit size and density, etc.	12. Collaborate with nonprofits to invest in community land trusts, rental support, incentives for developers to construct quality affordable units.
12a. Yes. 12b. No. I do not support the increase to property taxes without a clear plan of development and benefit to the city and our residents.	12a. No. 12b. No.	12a./b. Are you willing to a. spend city tax dollars and, if necessary, b. raise property taxes, in order to have the city more involved in the issue?	12a. Yes. 12b. No.	12a. No. 12b. No.	12a. Yes, limited . 12b. No.	12a. Yes. 12b. Yes.
13. Burlington has a history of racial violence and segregation. We must be honest about our history to learn from it, discover where harm and healing has taken place bringing these lessons to the present as we move to create a future where all are seen and heard.	13. The city should always be engaged in community outreach initiatives [to] assess racial climate/race relations. I believe the race relations have improved as the various cultures have integrated into our community.	13. How do you assess Burlington’s racial climate/race relations? [50-word limit]	13. Burlington is a community of good people, but like many cities, we have work to do. Our goal should be to constantly strive for better understanding and trust. There is a real opportunity for growth and to ensure every resident feels truly valued and part of our city’s success.	13. Burlington fosters an inclusive and welcoming community. I believe ongoing engagement, education, and community programs are key to continuing to improve race relations and ensuring that every resident feels valued and included.	13. We continue to be a city divided along racial and socioeconomic lines with real issues and perceived issues. We should deal with this using transparency, meaningful conversations and intentional strategies.	13. I reserve comment, but will state fortunately, there are resources to develop relationship building in race relations available in the county to persons willing to participate. I was one of the first participants in the Impact Alamance ACRE program. I have received racial equity training in this county and Chatham county’s services.
13a. We must work at making certain we are always treating others in the same manner that we want to be treated. As a city, and as individuals, we must always seek to better understand who we are and build relationships that help us to engage a different perspective from ourselves.	13a. The city has policies in place to hire on merit. I would like to see more minority members on our city advisory boards and commissions. This would help with better input and areas of improvement. We should always be transparent and engage in meaningful conversations to address real issues.	13a. What, if any, city policies should be changed or adopted to improve the racial climate/race relations in the city? [50 word limit]	13a. Policy must focus on creating fair access and opportunity. I will champion district-based representation for direct accountability and a data-driven Capital Improvement Plan to ensure equitable investment in all neighborhoods. Fair, transparent access to city contracts for all local businesses is also essential to building shared prosperity.	13a. Further research on relevant policies would be necessary to provide a fully informed response. That said, I support continued improvements in city services in several key areas: (1) diversity and bias training; (2) affordable housing initiatives; (3) community policing and engagement; (4) education and youth programs; and (5) cultural events and celebrations.	13a. I do not have an initial strategy for this. I will listen to all ideas and collaborate with our community to improve the outcomes.	13a. Invest in racial equity training for staff or encourage participation in Impact Alamance Alamance County Racial Equity Collaborative (ACRE) program.
14. When we develop a good strategic plan, we anticipate these needs and are not hit by these bills all at once but plan for them.	14. The study forecast needs for the next 5-25 years. As Burlington grows (west, south), we will need to plan for the future in that area.	Fire department 14. Recently, the city council heard a presentation from a consultant hired by the city who recommended three additional fire stations be built in the city (in addition to the six now existing). The consultant’s estimated cost for these additional stations was put at \$10-\$12 million each. How many of these stations do you believe are necessary? [25 word limit]	14. The number depends on smarter planning. Better street connectivity improves response times, which can reduce the need for expensive new stations. A CIP must analyze this.	14. After reviewing the feasibility study, I support the construction and operation of one additional fire station in Burlington.	14. I have not examined this issue yet.	14. I need to do more research on this.
14a. A development plan should be put in place to assess possibilities that look at creative solutions that work with public and private partnerships.	14a. Burlington will need to plan financially, putting money back each fiscal year in preparation for construction, equipment, and staffing. The other option is floating bonds.	14a. How would you envision paying to construct new stations? [25 word limit]	14a. If any stations are truly needed after a real analysis, a well-planned bond is the proper tool. The previous council botched that opportunity.	14a. A bond package would be required to fund the \$10–\$12 million capital expenditure. Ultimately, Burlington citizens will decide whether the city should move forward with the project.	14a. I oppose additional bond referendums at this time, but will listen to the evidence if presented.	14a. No response.
14b. As a city grows, there should be more resources to meet the needs of the city.	14b. Answered in 14a.	14b. Additionally, there would likely be additional personnel and equipment (fire trucks, etc.) needed for each additional station. How would you propose to pay for these additional expenses? [25 word limit]	14b. We must prioritize smarter, less expensive safety investments now. This allows future needs to be funded by an expanded tax base, not by burdening current taxpayers.	14b. The operational costs for a new fire station will be incorporated into the city’s regular budget process.	14b. We should create a 10-year plan with a clear understanding of all of the costs, to include inflation.	14b. No response.
15. No response.	15. More	Law Enforcement 15. In general, do you support more, the same, or less funding for Burlington’s police department? 16. Some citizens continue to express concerns about shootings, especially on the east side of the city. What is your own assessment of Burlington’s crime rate and trends, and how well are Burlington police responding to violent crime? [50 word limit]	16. Our police are responding professionally to violent crime. However, lasting safety requires a dual approach: supporting law enforcement while also making smart, long-term investments in positive opportunities for our youth. This is the most effective way to ensure a safe community for every family.	16. According to SBI crime statistics, Burlington’s overall crime index has declined since the COVID years of 2020 and 2021. The city saw a decrease in murder rates from 10 in 2021 to zero in 2023. Gun violence continues to be a top priority for the Burlington Police Department, and community involvement is essential.	16. The PD does an excellent job. There are long standing cultural and economic issues that will take all of us to fix.	16. There are shootings in various locations in Burlington; however, more policing may not be an only viable option to decrease gun violence. I am a former law enforcement officer trained in the past few years to develop violence prevention programming.
17. Providing greater opportunities for city residents, youth and adults, to engage in activities and meet the needs of our residents is an easy first step.	17. Gang members are routinely arrested, and successfully prosecuted. Criminal street gang activity will never be tolerated. Graffiti must be removed immediately, and offenders charged.	17. What, if anything, should the city do to reduce the threat of gangs, and the graffiti they paint in some areas of the city? [25-word limit]	17. We need a two-pronged strategy: targeted enforcement against criminal activity, and proactive community partnerships to provide positive alternatives and opportunities for our youth.	17. Most gang activity begins in middle and high schools, making it essential for Burlington to continue assigning sworn police officers as school resource officers within the school system.	17. Use volunteers to cover the graffiti. Partner with schools and churches at a very young age to involve children in activities and learned positive behaviors.	17. Provide activities and services needed; invest in young people; ask them what they need to improve their circumstances or conditions in which they live.
18. I know many of the black leaders and pastors in our community. I will continue to engage in these relationships and with these leaders as well as leaders of all races and cultures to work together to create a Burlington that listens to and works for all its citizens.	18. Being fully staffed should help this situation. Black community leaders have been great partners working with the PD to improve safety. Officers are highly respected and work closely with the Black community, including community outreach at the Morrowtown Community Garden and crime prevention efforts in neighborhoods.	18. In the past, some of Burlington’s black leaders and black pastors have expressed concerns about what they have considered to be an inadequate police patrol presence in east Burlington. Give your assessment of the current status of policing and police relationships in black communities of the city. [50 word limit]	18. Past concerns have been legitimate, and trust must be continuously earned. Progress has been made through community policing efforts, but the work is ongoing. I will support our police in strengthening these relationships through transparency, accountability, and consistent, positive engagement in every single neighborhood.	18. The majority of Burlington Police Department resources are concentrated in historically Black neighborhoods, which receive the highest level of patrol. Community involvement is essential—residents are encouraged to take responsibility and report any suspected criminal activity.	18. Some will say areas are over-policed and others will say they are under-policed. The Community Police Advisory Team is well positioned to provide guidance in this area.	18. I am a Black faith leader who will work with the police department to assess how Black and Brown populations can feel safe while building trust with it. I am a Black community leader who has worked closely and effectively with BPD. Some things can be improved. We can collaborate to make it better.
19. Oppose.	19. Oppose.	19. In the past, sheriff Terry Johnson has suggested that Burlington should consider establishing a police substation on the east side of the city, and he has volunteered that he would contribute two deputies to being a part of the staffing there. Would you support or oppose the idea of the city establishing a police substation in east Burlington?	19. Oppose.	19. Support.	19. Oppose. Cops sitting in a building does not impact crime. This deserves a full discussion.	19. Oppose.

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20. The CPAT does a wonderful job at helping the police department be in touch with the community. Community input is a priority.	20. Community input is critical to proper policing. The attendance of members is essential to the success of CPAT. Recently, CPAT has defended the PD.	20. What, if anything, do you feel can/will be accomplished by the community police advisory team established by the city council several years ago? [25-word limit]	20. It can build trust by creating a direct line of communication between residents and police leadership, fostering accountability and ensuring community perspectives are heard.	20. Its success depends on active citizen participation. The team provides the police department with feedback from specific communities and neighborhoods, creating a two-way channel of communication.	20. Properly staffed and involved, they will better impact the policies, practices and operation of the agency.	20. I worked with city of Burlington to establish its current community police advisory team in 2020 but do not have current data about it.
21. Bond referendums that were not researched adequately and somewhat hastily placed on the ballot. People did not know what they were voting for and the costs were drastically underestimated.	21. Most of the items that I have disagreed with over the last couple of years have been rectified-staff shortages, Police and Fire - increased pay. We are operating well, and our city is thriving.	21. What is your area of strongest disagreement with action(s) taken by the city council in the past 2-5 years? [50 word limit]	21. My strongest disagreement is the council's failure of leadership, resulting in an unaccountable city manager and rushed decisions like the bond referendums. This lack of transparency and due diligence has burdened taxpayers with boondoggle projects while critical needs are ignored, calling their professionalism into question.	21. Over the past two to five years, the Burlington City Council has worked together to advance a unified vision for the city. Their decisions have included supporting economic development initiatives, approving bond packages, enhancing Parks and Recreation programs, and investing in water and sewer projects.	21. We should be evaluating what we can do "with" the citizen and "for" the citizens, not "to" the citizens. The "with the citizens" has been missing, partly due to lack of interest and perhaps this can be corrected as we did with increased police collaboration over many years of hard work.	21. No response.
22. Affordable housing. Infrastructure to meet the growth of the city. Reduction in federal resources available for individuals, businesses and our city will create increased demands on our municipal government.	22. Economic development - growing the tax base. Proper planning, greater workforce development, and fully staffing our first responders and ensuring that our students are safe at school. Supporting our youth within our Recreation and Parks programs.	22. In your view, what are the three main issues facing Burlington during the next five years? [50 word limit]	22. First, controlling the rising tax burden by restoring fiscal discipline. Second, managing our city's growth with a data-driven Capital Improvement Plan to guide infrastructure investment. Third, restoring accountable, professional leadership to ensure City Hall is responsive to the needs of all residents and businesses.	22. 1. Economic Development and Job Growth – Communities need to attract and retain businesses, create quality jobs, and adapt to changing industries to sustain economic vitality. 2. Infrastructure and Public Services – Aging infrastructure, including roads, water and sewer systems, and public buildings, requires investment. 3. Public Safety and Community Well-Being.	22. 1) Finance: responsible stewardship and long-range planning are essential. 2) Safe schools and strong partnerships: properly trained SROs in every school is a start. 3) The need for open, transparent, and accountable government-we must communicate more effectively.	22. Food Insecurity. Gentrification of Underserved Communities. Economic Growth.