

INDY Week Candidate Questionnaire
2013 Raleigh City Council and Mayor

PRIMARY AND GENERAL

Name as it appears on the ballot: Thomas G. Crowder

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Do you have a Facebook page? Not at the moment

If you have a Twitter account, please list your username/handle:

Note: Please submit a digital photo of yourself along with your completed questionnaire, if you haven't already sent us one. Campaign literature, résumés and any other relevant materials you'd like us to consider are also most welcome. Thanks!

1. What do you see as the most important issues facing Raleigh? If elected, what are your top three priorities in addressing those issues?

Growth will continue to be our greatest challenge; in particular water quality and quantity, reliable transportation networks, mixed income

housing opportunities and preserving our natural environment, existing neighborhoods, historic resources and quality of life will all be strained.

During my next term I will:

- *Lead the discussion on future water resources. Even with adding the Little River Reservoir, which has environmental consequences of its own. It is not enough water to sustain us 50-years from now. It is past time to determine and commit to legitimate and reliable options that will serve Raleigh through the end of this century.*
- *Continue to promote refinements and changes to the new UDO that will promote mixed-income housing at our mixed-use centers. Work to create a graduated impact fee system and/or other incentives to encourage mixed-income housing throughout the city, preventing warehousing our lower wealth citizens in concentrated buildings and specific areas of the city.*
- *Insure District D residents participate thoroughly in an upcoming citywide rezoning of residential properties and commercial properties, as well as have a voice at the table. With the passage of the new Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) a massive citywide rezoning will take place on properties currently zoned higher than R-10 (10 units to the acre). That includes all commercially zoned properties. This act alone will have the largest impact, positive, or negative on the city's natural environment and neighborhood quality of life than any Council action that has taken place over the last thirty years.*

2. What in your record as a public official or other experience demonstrates your ability to be effective on the issues you've identified? Please be as specific as possible in relating past accomplishments to current goals.

- *First and foremost, I have and will continue to promote proactive planning. Starting during my tenure on the City's Planning Commission, I championed the Urban Design Guidelines, the precursor to today's new UDO.*
- *Authored of the first City Council Mission statement to guide the Council and city staff on the future vision for the city...*
<http://www.raleighnc.gov/government/content/BoardsCommissions/Articles/CityCouncil.html>
- *By creating the District D Neighborhood Alliance I actively engaged SW Raleigh residents in the creation of Raleigh's updated Comprehensive Plan, recommending over fifty changes to protect*

- existing neighborhoods and improve the quality of life in District D.*
- *Led the way to remove assessments on sidewalks making it easier for moderate and lower wealth communities to make their neighborhoods walkable.*
 - *Have a strong voting record of protecting the city's two watersheds, decreasing stormwater runoff and with Mayor Meeker lead the city to begin purchasing lands and buffers along tributaries leading into Falls Lake.*
 - *Please visit my website for additional examples.*

3. Indy Week's mission is to help build a just community in the Triangle and North Carolina. Please point to a specific position in your platform that would, if achieved, help further that goal.

My platform when I first ran and continues to be based on the City's Mission Statement I penned , to provide an environmental, economic and culturally sustainable vision for our city and provide the courage to lead us in that direction. I will continue to promote:

- *Protecting our natural environment and resources.*
- *Conserving our financial resources by building more sustainably, promoting investment that that have a pay back to our citizens like the Falls Lake Initiative, that protects water quality, prevent costly clean-ups later and investing in our parks and infrastructure to keep our quality of life from degrading. Our economic success is dependent on maintaining a high quality of life for all our citizens.*
- *Raleigh and particularly District D has a highly diverse landscape, housing stock and citizenry. Through proactive planning, vision and leadership I will continue insure that diversity is maintained and strengthened.*

4. Identify and explain one principled stand you would be willing to take if elected that you suspect might cost you some popularity points with voters.

Given the fact the General Assembly has greatly restricted local government's ability to enact progressive legislation; that is a hard question to answer. While no specific issues comes to mind at this very moment, I believe I will confront such issues as I have in the past. I can point to my record, which the Indy has covered on several occasions:

"A Council committee last week caused a stir when two of its three members balked at including the words "sexual orientation" in the mission statement. With Councilors Mike Regan and Philip Isley ready to vote no, and only Councilor Thomas Crowder in favor, HRC members decided to withdraw the language--temporarily. But Tuesday, the full Council restored it, with Mayor Charles Meeker and Councilors Janet Cowell, James West and Jessie Taliaferro joining Crowder in the 5-3 majority. "Our city simply has no place for intolerance and prejudice," Meeker said. Regan, Isley and Neal Hunt voted no

Voting against the Lightner Center was another controversial matter that I an three other councilors stood our ground. I'm sure there are many other examples documented on your pages during my five terms on Council

5. If these issues haven't been addressed above, would you please comment on:

a) The role of City Council members and their relationship to the manager and staff is an issue currently. Some think council members should talk only to the manager, insulating staffers from political pressure. Others think the members should also be able to question department heads and staff as part of their policy oversight role and to resolve constituents' problems. A middle course would be oversight by committee, a time-consuming job for the part-time council. What's your position on this?

City Councilors are the policy makers and city staff are there to insure those policies are carried out. During my tenure on the Council, Russell Allen was the City Manager. I have gone directly to department heads and managers on numerous occasions; always copying the City Manager and often the Mayor and other Councilors. Never was political pressure used; however I did advocate for our customers, the citizens of Raleigh. In fact City Manager Allen never discouraged us from working with staff, and vice versa. I encourage cross-communicational lines between staff and the Council and believe it is healthy for our city. Furthermore, I often hear from citizens that feel they have no voice when traversing the city's beuracracy and rules. As Russell Allen often said, it all comes down to five votes in the end.

b) Council members are paid little (\$17,000 for the mayor; \$12-13,000 for the others) and, except for the city attorney and clerk, no professional staff report to them. All staff work for the manager. Would you change this system at all, and if so, how?

The City Council was recently criticized by the Mayor of Kansas City due to a News & Observer Article suggesting the City Council was

micromanaging. The Mayor of Kansas City, comparable in size to Raleigh makes over \$100,000.00 and City Councilors make approximately \$75,000.00. Like Raleigh, it is perceived as a part-time job. I believe the Mayor also has 12 full-time staff that report directly to him and 20 part-time staff. Each city Councilor has a dedicated assistant and one research/policy person at their disposal. I have and would continue to advocate for more staff.

c) In light of the scandal unfolding at the Raleigh Business and Technical Center, supposedly a business incubator, is it time to beef up the City Council's oversight mechanisms? Are other city-sponsored agencies and city departments vulnerable to similar problems?

Ultimately, the buck stops at the Council table. It is time Council review current policies update them to insure that adequate checks and balances are in place regarding accountability of all funds the city disperses.

d) Do you support the goals of the 2009 comprehensive plan and the brand new Unified Development Ordinance? Will these two initiatives really change the way Raleigh develops over the next several decades—and for the better? Or for the worse?

I do support the vast majority of the 2009 adopted 2030 Comprehensive Plan, in particular the Future Land Use Map (FLUM). The citizens of District D and throughout our city set the vision for our urban form over the next 20-years. We must insure that vision is carried out during rezonings and any changes/enhancements to the UDO.

I also support the majority of rules outlined in the newly adopted UDO; however I believe there are a large number of them that will need to be tweaked if we are truly committed to upholding our vision of the Comp Plan. The real test will come when we apply zoning categories, frontages and heights to our zoning map over the next 18-months.

e) How important is improving public transit in Raleigh and the region to the city's future prosperity, do you think?

One simple word is needed; critical.

f) If elected, will you ask the Wake County Commissioners to allow a public referendum in 2014 on a ½-cent sales tax for transit, the same as Durham and Orange counties have passed?

Absolutely; more importantly I will lobby our citizens to place pressure on the County Commission to place it on the next available election.

g) Until the ½-cent sales tax is in place in Wake, what else should Raleigh do on its own, if anything, to jump-start public transit within the city?

First and foremost, we can promote the development/redevelopment of our TOD zoning districts, of course reserving land for future rail stops. Additionally, we the Council can and are beginning the process of evaluating other transit routes, rubber tired and fixed guide way that will supplement the Wake County and Regional Transit Plan. Based on approved fixed guide way routes identified in that study, the Council should include them in upcoming city transportation bonds.

h) Raleigh is trying to gain control of the 325-acre Dorothea Dix Hospital tract for use as a destination park. Do you support this effort? Should Raleigh pay fair-market value for the land, via lease or purchase, as many in the General Assembly demand? Please share your thoughts on how development of the park should be financed, if at all?

I was the first city councilor over a decade ago who publicly supported all 306 plus acres of Dorothea Dix property be used as a world-class urban destination park. That support has not languished. Personally, I believe the city should not have to pay the state for the property. There are numerous examples where local governments have been given perpetual leases for a dollar a year. With that said, I continue to support paying a fair price for the property as a park use. It is my hopes that a lease close to the one Governor Purdue signed can be negotiated. If that is the case, then financing would not be needed to obtain the park.

i) As part of a growth and economic development strategy, should Raleigh begin to use tax-increment financing (TIFs), subsidizing current developments with anticipated future property tax gains? If so, what policy limits, in any, should be adopted as part of a TIF plan?

A TIF incentive policy has previously been adopted by the City. I served on that Council. It recommends that tax-increment financing only be used in areas where redevelopment would not otherwise take place. I continue to believe this to be a sound policy.

j) For many years, it's been a point of pride for Raleigh managers and Council members that Raleigh government costs less, and the city's property tax rate is lower, than other towns in Wake County and other North Carolina cities. On the other hand, services may suffer because of inadequate funding. Are you concerned that Raleigh is investing too little to achieve the world-class status to which it aspires? Or can spending be cut further without sacrificing quality?

I do think Raleigh should continue taking a fiscally conservative approach with our citizen's tax dollars; however it must be balanced with strategic investments and reinvestments that will insure we continue to be financially sustainable. Past councils I have served on over the last five-years have responded appropriately to the great recession and Raleigh is financially secure because of their prudence. As we rebound, Raleigh will be in the position to place more dollars into infrastructure reinvestment. Our fiscal prudence has also maintained credit ratings that allow us to borrow monies at substantially lower interest rates.

k) Is Raleigh doing enough to serve its growing Hispanic population and help them feel a part of the city?

Raleigh and specifically District D, SW Raleigh the "Capital City's Creative District" has become more highly diverse. District D is home to a large Hispanic's, Asian, African-American, Indian, and Muslim population. RPD has done a very good job of reaching out to the Hispanics in the city. While we reach out to all of these groups through the Human Relations Commission, International Festival and other venues, appointments to boards and commissions, there is much more we can do to educate, empower and engage them.

l) Is Raleigh doing enough to serve its growing population of homeless and street people, many of whom suffer with mental illnesses? If not, what do you recommend?

There is never enough that we can do to help our homeless population; however I believe Raleigh has reached out in numerous ways, particularly given the fact that this social service is the primary function of Wake County, the state and federal governments. Raleigh helps fund many non-profits and also has and continues to initiatives such as the Southeast Raleigh Assembly, the Raleigh Business and Technical Center (up until just recently) and led the 10-year Plan to End Homelessness. In addition to completing the 10-year PTEH, focusing on creating mixed-income, mixed-use centers throughout the city will also help by reducing auto

dependency, one of the largest expenditures a family pays in order to get to and from work. Seeing our transit vision become a reality is another primary tool to help reduce and even eliminate car dependency.

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Thank you for allowing me to participate in this candidate questionnaire!