

1. What is your vision for growth and development in Asheville?

My vision for growth and development in Asheville is one that is focused on integration of all municipal services to create a quality, safe, attractive, and diverse place where people from all walks of life can live and prosper. I think a community's approach to its development process is just as important and inseparable from its approach to economic development, parks and recreation, transportation, or infrastructure planning and it is only through the integration of these services and programs that Asheville will continue to be the thriving place that it is.

2. Do you believe Asheville has taken an approach that is too "pro-growth" or "anti-growth" over the past 5-6 years? Please share your reasons.

When I walk around my neighborhood (West Asheville) or downtown, I am often astonished at the growth and development that has taken place since first moving here 14 years ago. On the other hand, professionally I provide planning services to towns and counties throughout WNC where there are places that are relatively the same as they were 20 or even 30 years ago. I live in a place with astounding growth and work in places with little to no growth, and given a choice between the two, I'll take the place with growth and development over the place with none. The longer I work with towns that struggle because they are stagnant, the more I've become a growth proponent. I don't want to live in Andrews, NC because it doesn't have great bike lanes and greenways, attractive areas to play and eat, decent housing choices, or a vibrant downtown because it doesn't have the growth to support such amenities. I like my amenities and I now know that it takes growth to have them.

While I am supportive of a pro-growth approach, I am not supportive of an all out growth at any cost approach. I am supportive of a moderated approach to growth that is well-planned, focused on safety and environmental quality, and is guided by a community's stated vision. In my view, Asheville has adopted a moderated approach to growth over the past 5-6 years. Like any other City, Asheville's approach to growth is complicated because planning policy in general is behind the times. When a new trend comes along, that trend is automatically ahead of the policy decision made in reaction to it. In spite of this dynamic, Asheville is able to respond to changes to maintain its moderated approach to growth because it has a strong framework for growth and development decision making through its comprehensive plan, neighborhood plans, the Downtown Master Plan, coordinated planning and development services, and other tools. Unfortunately, with the diversity of opinions found throughout Asheville, there are always those who will view Asheville's moderated approach as too pro-growth or too anti-growth; thereby complicating efforts on how to best respond to emerging trends.

3. How strictly should interpretation and application of the Unified Development Ordinance be applied?

In the initial phases of planning a development, the UDO should be strictly applied as it is through the application of the UDO's standards that one can identify the areas of the UDO that, when strictly applied, are problematic to project development. Asheville has avenues (TRC recommendations, the Board of Adjustment, a variety of zoning districts, incentives, etc.) to find the place that honors the intent of the UDO and vision for the community while still meeting needs of the project developer. From my experience with Asheville's Board of Adjustment compared to my planning work in other communities, Asheville's staff, P&Z Commission, and Council go to great lengths to work with developers on projects. While the ability to work toward a compromise through a variety of tools is one of the City's strengths, I do not think the public always understands how the planning process works. As citizens, the complicated and controversial projects – Staples, Greenlife, Larchmont, Caledonia -- shape our opinion as to how things work. We don't see the day to day smaller decisions and therefore, we assume that the UDO regulations are too restrictive or not restrictive enough (depending on which side you are on) and miss the fact that for the majority of cases, strict application of the UDO works.

4. Name one Planning & Zoning Commission decision in the last 18 months you've agreed with and one you've disagreed with or would have struggled with. Please explain your rationale for each.

In the last 18 months, I believe the most controversial project to come before P&Z and City Council is the Caledonia project, however, because this case has been continued with Asheville's Board of Adjustment, I have to refrain from stating whether I agree or disagree with the decisions made in that case.

A P&Z Commission decision with which I agree is the Larchmont project off Merrimon Avenue. The project met many of the city's overall strategic goals, such as an increase in affordable housing (particularly one-bedroom apartments), infill development, and transportation-oriented development. Additionally, the project is a good example of the progress that can be made when the developer, a neighborhood, and the City have open lines of communication in an effort to find mutually agreeable solutions. Planning board members are often called on to make recommendations that are tough and unpopular, yet the long term vision for the community has to guide the decision making process and this project is an example of that situation.

The Smoky Park Ingles is a recent decision that I don't agree with. While I don't disagree with P&Z's final decision, this project illustrates one of the challenging aspects of being a planning board member. I buy the majority of my clothes secondhand and bike to work on most days. It is a value of mine to reduce and reuse resources. When stores such as Ingles want to double their store size, I get twitchy when I think about the resources needed for the expansion. Why not just rehab what the existing building or be satisfied with what they have? In this case, it was the project, not the decision, with which I disagree. But here's the thing, as a member of Asheville's Board of Adjustment, and as a potential member of the Planning and Zoning Commission, I have to separate my personal hot-buttons from the project that is before me. I think that is the biggest challenge planning board members face. As a P&Z member, it is my role to listen to the information presented, hear the facts objectively, and connect those to the overall vision for that part of the community.

5. What are some of the positive or negative effects of Asheville's zoning regulations?

One of the most positive effects of Asheville's zoning regulation is that it allows for some discretion between planning decision makers (staff, P&Z, and Council) and developers to come to some mutual agreement on projects. Additionally, I think Asheville's UDO has done a good job integrating typical zoning regulations such as establishing districts, lot dimensions, and buffers, with elements that aren't as traditional, such as design standards, lighting requirements, landscaping, and sidewalk requirements. Many of the zoning decisions contribute the vibrancy of Asheville.

Of the challenges, Asheville's UDO is big and somewhat complicated. I think that the UDO is a little beyond the average person's understanding or familiarity. For example, when you have someone involved in a large scale project, the developer often has a team of people such as an architect, engineer, and an attorney at their disposal. Collectively, the team knows how to negotiate the development process. On the flip side, someone such as a small business owner often does not have a development team or previous experience to rely on. For example, the BOA recently heard a case where a new business owner opened a store in the shopping center near Sam's Club. The owner came before the BOA for a sign variance because, in strict application of the ordinance, the sign for the owner's shop would not be visible from the storefront. In the variance application and through the hearing, it was clear that the business owner did not have full understanding of what was happening or why things progressed as they did. While in the grand scheme of things this may seem like a small issue, I suspect that issues like this are more common than not. On a side note, in the example used, staff were very helpful in walking the business owner through the process.