

We invite the 2025 City of Charleston council candidates to respond with their views and plans to support a thriving, diverse local economy, back local businesses and entrepreneurs, and enhance the quality of life for residents.

1. Supporting Local Businesses and Entrepreneurs

What specific policy or program would you champion to reduce administrative burdens (such as complex permitting processes or restrictive zoning) for new and expanding small, locally-owned businesses and entrepreneurs, especially those creating a more diverse mix of retail and services in Charleston?

As the Managing Director of a small business, I understand that to a small business - time is money and the stakes are high. To truly empower local entrepreneurs, I will lead changes so small, locally-owned businesses aren't strangled by red tape. I would like to explore and implement a **"Small Business Fast Track"** unit that aligns permit, zoning, fire, and design review into one coordinated path, with a goal of issuing conditional approvals within **48 business hours**. I'll also push to waive or rebate permitting fees (up to a certain threshold) for new neighborhood storefronts in underutilized commercial corridors. Within Charleston, such incentive programs already exist (e.g. the City offers priority review, fee waivers under the *Priority Status Affordable Housing* program) and flexible zoning measures for mixed-use and affordable housing in sections of the Zoning code. We'll extend that same logic to commercial permits. Lastly, I'll propose "pop-up testing permits" (90-180 days) so new retail or service concepts can pilot without full long-term commitment. These reforms can reduce the cost and risk barrier for home-grown business growth. Recently I was tasked with looking for a space along the Folly Rd. corridor for a youth sports program, I was shocked at the cost of rent between \$6,000 - \$12,000 per month. That is a huge barrier to a new business with great community benefit. I would also be interested in looking at a "Startup Lease Assistance" where the City would grant 3 months rent to qualifying businesses so they can focus on any revenue or profit coming in so the small business can focus on staffing their business, or building inventory, or upgrading the space. As a member of City Council, I will consistently engage with City staff on permitting issues related to large and small businesses.

2. Quality of Life for Local Residents

Charleston's growth has intensified traffic congestion and contributed to high housing costs. What is your plan to improve the daily quality of life for residents by addressing the intersection of transportation and housing, specifically to enable local workers to afford to live closer to their jobs and reduce reliance on long-distance commutes?

Charleston's growth demands that we rethink how people live and move. I propose enabling **"Homes Near Work" incentives** — density bonuses, reduced parking minimums, and fee waivers for housing built within walkable distances to major job centers or transit routes.

Charleston already allows zoning flexibility and density bonuses for developments with affordable units under its **Priority Status Affordable Housing Program**, including reduced parking, waived fees, and expedited review. I'd expand that to workforce housing in key corridors (e.g. Folly, Maybank, Camp Rd). Then, pair housing with mobility: expand reliable transit (CARTA) service and invest in safe walking/biking infrastructure. The goal: more Charleston workers live close to jobs, reduce commute distances, and ease congestion. This dual housing + transit push can improve daily life — less traffic, more time with family, fewer stress miles.

3. Maximizing Local Impact of City Spending

How would you reform the City's purchasing and procurement policies to prioritize and increase the percentage of municipal contracts and purchases awarded to qualified local businesses and suppliers, thereby recirculating tax dollars within the local economy?

Our tax dollars should circle back into our community. The City's procurement policy already includes **Local Vendor Recognition**, enabling local vendors who match lowest bids (within 4% or \$10,000) to compete favorably for city contracts. I will strengthen that: expand local preference into non-construction bids, reduce bidding thresholds so small local firms can bid, and require departments to *unbundle* large contracts so smaller firms may compete. As Managing Director for a small, diverse supplier, I understand the importance of being paid efficiently. Not only will we streamline the process (digital bidding, vendor portals), I'd like to commit to **Net-15 payment** for local vendors. To support qualifying smaller firms, I'll launch a **Vendor Education Clinic** and help with bonding/insurance bundling. These reforms make procurement more inclusive, help recirculate dollars locally, and support growing small companies in Charleston. One of my main goals as a City Council member will be to ensure a fair and equitable procurement process for all City of Charleston vendors and contractors.

4. Diversifying the Local Economy

Recommendations to update the City's 10-year old Tourism Management Plan kicked off earlier this year in partnership with Bloomberg Associates. How do you believe the implementation of this revised plan, in partnership with other local policies, can help address the loss of neighborhood businesses and ensure our commercial districts remain diverse and vibrant?

Updating the Tourism Management Plan is a chance to reset how we balance visitors and neighborhoods. In implementing the new plan, I'll ensure **tourism dollars support neighborhood vitality** — for example, via façade & interior grants for everyday retail, rotating **pop-up markets** in commercial districts, and mandating **local maker sourcing** in city-run

events. We'll pair tourism controls (e.g. capped event density, smart routing, off-peak incentives) with resident-first streetscapes: benches, shade, bike parking, safe crossings. Also, we'll require that a portion of hospitality/visitor tax revenue go to **commercial corridor stabilization funds**. Charleston's zoning rules already allow density bonuses and mixed-use zoning in certain areas to encourage diversity in commercial/residential mixes. Leveraging that, coordinated with the tourism plan, we can reverse retail decline in neighborhoods by aligning visitor traffic with local services. The loss of small neighborhood businesses in the City of Charleston is a real serious concern. As a member of City Council, I look forward to tackling this issue.