

Leslie Skardon
Charleston City Council – District 12

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?

Before becoming the leader of a statewide non-profit, I worked for nearly a decade with businesses of all types as a strategy consultant. I earned my MBA at night while working full time because I believe in business as a force for good in our communities. As a CEO, I work with businesses of all sizes – from the largest companies in the state to small start-ups.

In order for businesses to succeed they need certainty, and we cannot let needless bureaucracy create unreasonable timelines for grand openings and critical improvements. I believe that if a business follows regulations and the law that there should be a streamlined permitting and approval process.

We have a set of standards to protect our quality of life and our environment. I would encourage the zoning code re-write to be re-started and move forward to provide clarity to businesses. If a project meets those standards, it shouldn't be stuck indefinitely due to bureaucracy or government inefficiency. We have to cut red tape to make progress on these issues for small local businesses.

Additionally, I believe that government can help foster innovation and that there should be incentives to start small businesses so entrepreneurs can thrive.

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?

Affordable and attainable housing is a key issues across James Island and Charleston. We must ensure that our first responders, teachers and other hard-working Charlestonians can live where they work – this is a matter of public safety. This is also a traffic issue – if people can't live where they work, we will have more cars on the road and more traffic.

We must invest in infrastructure that supports our current and future population. When these investments are made, they should include multi-modal opportunities to help connect communities, people and get cars off the road. These infrastructure improvements can also help people safely reach local businesses when they are driving down busy roads. We must have comprehensive planning to allows our communities to be connected. Projects like the Lowcountry Rapid Transit bus line and Rethink Folly Road will help us meet these goals.

Additionally, we must look at policies to increase the number of affordable units across the City, and ways to keep current units affordable. I will work with experts in the field to examine and implement a number of policies, including tax incentives, housing trust funds and private-sector solutions, to help address this issue.

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?

The people and businesses who live and work in our City know it best. I do believe that preference should be given to qualified local businesses who have teams that live and work in the Lowcountry and understand the unique dynamics and qualities of our City.

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?

Our local businesses are a key part of what makes our community so special. Part of improving our quality of life is having the interconnectivity and multimodal infrastructure to safely get to and support our small businesses. On James Island, we have amazing local restaurants and coffee shops, but all too often the only way to access them is by car which adds to traffic, and creates more dangerous road conditions, especially on Folly. This is a key example of how better infrastructure can lead to a strong local economy and community through increasing foot traffic and creating better access to local businesses.

When residents have access to local businesses, our economy will thrive.