

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?

Charleston's small and locally-owned businesses are at the core of what makes our city unique. We need to make it easier for them to start, grow, and thrive. I support streamlining permitting so that businesses aren't stuck in months of red tape for simple projects. That means setting clear timelines for reviews, cutting unnecessary requirements, and using a "one-stop" process that allows entrepreneurs to get answers without being bounced between departments.

Just as important, we must update zoning so that neighborhood-serving businesses—grocers, child care centers, restaurants, shops—can locate closer to where people live, not just in a few commercial corridors. By reducing barriers, we can foster a more diverse mix of businesses in our districts while protecting what makes Charleston special.

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?

Our growth has outpaced infrastructure, which means housing costs are too high and traffic congestion is worse than ever. I believe the solution is to align housing and transportation planning. Density should go where it makes sense—on the peninsula and along transit corridors—not in sprawling developments far from jobs. That's how we ensure our workforce can afford to live near where they work, reducing the long commutes that choke our roads.

I support expanding reliable mass transit, including long-term planning for the Lowcountry Rapid Transit line to West Ashley. At the same time, we need to modernize zoning and incentives to encourage workforce housing in job-rich areas and to cut outdated requirements, like excessive parking minimums, that drive up costs. This approach will both improve daily quality of life for residents and strengthen our neighborhoods.

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?

Charleston's purchasing power is one of the most effective tools we have to support our own economy. I would push to reform procurement policies to make it easier for qualified local businesses to win city contracts. That includes breaking down larger contracts into smaller scopes that local firms can realistically compete for, providing technical assistance so small businesses know how to navigate the bid process, and adopting local preference policies where allowed.

Transparency is key: residents should be able to see where their tax dollars go and how much of that spending supports Charleston-based companies. By keeping more of our city budget circulating locally, we strengthen the very businesses that hire our residents and invest in our neighborhoods.

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?

Tourism is vital to Charleston, but it cannot be our only economic engine. The city's revised Tourism Management Plan gives us an opportunity to balance visitor activity with neighborhood preservation. I believe it should be implemented in a way that prevents our commercial districts from being overrun with purely tourist-oriented businesses, so that residents still have access to essential services and diverse retail.

At the same time, we need to pair tourism management with strategies that grow other sectors: healthcare, technology, the port economy, creative industries, and advanced manufacturing. By making room for both neighborhood-serving businesses and new industries, we can protect the quality of life for residents while broadening opportunities for the next generation of Charlestonians.