



CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

CANDIDATE NAME: ALICE ROLLI

- 1) **CREATIVE WORKFORCE VALUE** - What impact does Nashville's creative workforce - actors, artists, dancers, musicians and the overall creative class - have on the city's identity and well-being?

Comments: Egypt has its pyramids. Italy has its frescoes. And Nashville. Nashville has its songwriters. We are the Music City.

Without songwriters we would not have full concert venues. Without songwriters we would not have full productions at TPAC. Without songwriters we would not have the stage designers, the instrument makers, the make-up artists, the sound designers, the vocalists, the dancers. We are a music city because of our creators.

In 2020 as a board member of WPLN-NPR we were asked to vote on whether or not to transform the station of 91.1 from a classical station to an independent music station. At the height of the pandemic everyone was looking for reasons to not do something - to not stick their heads out - to not advocate for change. But our new station CEO was recruited to do just that - to help us, all of us, embrace what was possible for the future before us. To realize our full potential. At a critical moment a board member reflected on the words of a former mayor, and later Tennessee Governor. He said "well Mayor Bredesen said that great cities have civic furniture - like an opera, a ballet, a symphony and, I wonder if we ought to have a classical station, as a sort of civic furniture, even if it is losing money each year - because it is what makes a great city."

The call turned silent. You could feel the hesitation. Why do something new when it is more comfortable - particularly in COVID - to not stick your head out and advocate for change? And so I came off of mute and shared this. "Governor Alexander shares a story that when recruiting Nissan to Tennessee a fancy dinner was hosted at the residence. At the conclusion of the dinner a lady from Nashville came up to him, embarrassed, that he had a fiddler play. He said to her, "ma'am, why would we have an average Chopin player when we could have a world class fiddler?"

And that is what 91.1 is, today. A place where we don't replay the greats of other cities - but where we broadcast, loudly, the sound of our city. The vote was then, in favor, of the new format for the station.

Creatives force us - all of us - to leave our comfort zone. My husband took his GI Bill and went to Watkins Film School -and so I've seen, first hand, the power of the creative community here to embrace even a 20+ year army veteran. This is the soul of our city.

- 2) **CREATIVE CULTURE CRISIS** - Do you believe Nashville is currently facing a crisis, in which its creative workforce can no longer afford to sustainably work and live here? If so, what strategies do you have for addressing the crisis?

- a. YES
- b. NO
- c. PREFER NOT TO TAKE POSITION

Comments: Absolutely - any person in the middle class is facing a crisis in Nashville. This is by our own doing. Over the last 20 years we have consistently elected individuals who have driven our city into severe debt - we today as a city have more debt than the entire state of Tennessee, combined. We have raised taxes and water rates, consistently, so that on an economic basis (meaning the actual dollars and the percent of household earnings) Nashville families carry the highest tax burden of any citizens in the state. Now the downtown crowd will say that the rate is lower - but the rate is not what you pay. You pay the total, you don't pay a rate. And the total - that's high and will keep climbing. If we keep electing the same people we will keep getting the same result - which is pushing our creative class to move to neighboring counties - where families can afford the rent or property taxes, where families can be assured their children can have a good education, and where - sadly, performers must commute a long way to make this the Music City.

I am the only candidate who has pledged to not raise taxes.

- 3) **CREATIVE WORKFORCE HOUSING** - Would you prioritize the development of creative workforce housing (for example, through an MDHA initiative such as the Ryman Lofts)?

- a. YES
- b. NO
- c. PREFER NOT TO TAKE POSITION

Comments: Practically I'm not sure how it is possible to take a position on a single occupational class code for housing. For housing, broadly, we need to look at both the private sector and any impediments to permitting we are creating within city government (for example, legislation recently passed the General Assembly which should address our backlog of electrical permitting). We should get smart and focused on where we need to create capacity to address bottlenecks which are contributing to more time - and more time contributes to higher costs.

To spur on additional housing stock - to help increase supply - we need to review all of our tools (MDHA, Barnes, Catalyst Fund) but also figure out what is missing from our portfolio and bring it to the table. We need to reset our relationship with the THDA to ensure that state policies and programs are benefitting residents of Davidson County. We need to performance manage through to be sure every dollar is effectively used. When we continue to raise taxes on our most affordable housing stock, we continue to pass higher costs onto renters. Our campaign is the only one to have pledged to not raise taxes in order to reverse that trend of higher costs.

- 4) **CREATIVE SPACE** - Would you support publicly owned, unoccupied space to be transformed into creative development or presentation space for music and the arts in Nashville? What

additional solutions to the lack of creative space would you explore as Mayor (such as preserving existing spaces through a land trust for historic venues and the like)?

- a. YES
- b. NO
- c. PREFER NOT TO TAKE POSITION

Comments: We cannot make more land or more time. There is a great deal of land owned by the city of Nashville that is underutilized. If a cogent, funded, project is presented to use unoccupied metro space, I'm absolutely for evaluating the merits of the project. We know that TPAC has to find a new location. We know that WPLN and other arts and entertainment non-profits could help activate spaces - both public and private - which are currently underutilized. We know that hybrid work environments are the "new normal." Taken together, whether it is existing metro land, or privately developed and under-occupied commercial space endeavoring to activate its space to attract tenants - the arts community should take its place as a magnet for building culture - a key tenant in attracting and retaining workers to knowledge economy jobs. The presence of art spaces and creative spaces is an asset to private and public projects in the city.

- 5) **CITY ARTS FUNDING** - This city's arts budget has not kept up with the growth of the artists and arts organizations in Nashville despite the growth of the city. Would you support funding Metro Arts at 1% of the combined Metro and MNPS budget? (Roughly \$30 Million of support annually.)

- a. YES
- b. NO
- c. PREFER NOT TO TAKE POSITION

Comments: Because of decisions made for the last 20 years by successive administrations, our city today spends \$400+million dollars on debt service. Today we have 1.96 officers per thousand residents and more than 200 positions are empty. That compares to a national average of closer to 2.3 officers per thousand residents. So, we are woefully behind on many metrics for the city. I have pledged to not raise taxes so that we won't continue the trend of shuttering music venues because of massive tax increases. I have pledged to not raise taxes so that we won't continue raising rents as a direct result of our city's fiscal mismanagement.

We are, today, rated 68 out of 75 of the country's largest cities for our fiscal management - a SINKHOLE city - with nearly 4 times the debt per resident (\$19,800) than the state's next largest city. Until we get our fiscal house in order we will not be free of the threat of takeover by the state - because we as a single county have more debt than the entire state of Tennessee, combined. We found ourselves a few years ago giving away through a 99 year lease our city's protected public parkland - and a UNESCO World Heritage Site of Memory, Ft. Negley - to balance our city budget. The next year the William Edmonson Homesite - home of the first African American to have a solo show at the MOMA - was going to be sold to fill another budget hole. Until we get our finances in order I am not prepared to make new spending commitments outside of public safety, education, and basic infrastructure needs.

- 6) **CITY RELIEF FUNDING** - The Arts & Business Council launched an Artist Relief Fund in 2020 to compensate for the cancellation of scheduled gigs or opportunities (such as a commission, performance, etc.), or due to layoff/furlough as a result of the March 2020 tornados and/or COVID-19 pandemic. It experienced such high demand that only half the applicants could be funded. Would you support the creation and funding of an ongoing emergency relief fund for

Nashville's creative workforce (similar to the Austin Music Disaster Relief Grant)? If so, at what level would you fund it?

- a. YES
- b. NO
- c. PREFER NOT TO TAKE POSITION

Comments: This seems like a case of matching risk and should be funded through ticket sales or through the Music City Center / Convention Center Authority. Our brand, for the CVC, is built on artists - and whether it is subsidized health care, economical parking or bus fare, or the management of projects related to the arts and creative class - I believe these should be located closest to, and with input towards, the dollars the city is receiving - primarily through the CVC - so that we are not making complicated relationships, but we are matching the creators with those who benefit most from their work - so that ideas which benefit creatives are funded at the best source.

7) **MUSIC EDUCATION** - Do you commit to working toward the establishment of fully funded music, visual art, and/or theater arts programs in every Metro Public School? If so, what strategies would you employ?

- a. YES
- b. NO
- c. PREFER NOT TO TAKE POSITION

Comments: Please share my OPED on this topic of supporting music education - from well before I was asking anyone for a single vote - with the team.

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/2018/07/28/my-son-safe-when-school-starts/838221002/>

Knowing where candidates stand and what they believe before they are vying for your support, is critical.

Mandatory K-5 Music education is fundamental to the education of all children. It does not only teach music, it teaches children how to play together and how to realize that every instrument and each voice is distinct and that, working together, can create a more beautiful sound. I have not only advocated for arts education within the state of Tennessee - but also nationally and at state capitols - from Tallahassee to Raleigh to Austin to Albuquerque - and many places in between.

There is no surer way to go to heaven than to support elementary music educators. When we look at our city's education budget and see that more than half of the funds are going to non-classroom instruction, I am fairly confident we can find the funds - in a more than billion dollar budget - to ensure music instruction for all children grades K-5, and where possible, beyond.

8) What other strategies are you exploring to support the creative economy in Nashville?

Comments: We need to match the brand and the engine of music city - and the value captured primarily at the MCC tax district - with the creative community. There appears to be a disconnect between where advocacy for arts and music should reside (e.g. Mayor's Office,

City Department, Music City Center). After managing the financing for the Tennessee Entertainment Commission (and its best budget years ever), I am a firm believer that matching budget with the purpose of an office, or the role of the staff member, is critical. Otherwise you build a lot of vanity offices for a single person, with no budget.

Music City's entertainment does not exist without artists and musicians and songwriters and all who support the production of events. We need to firmly connect both the MCC and the support of working entertainers and artists on whom our city's entertainment industry depends - so that the tax dollars collected in that district are directly connected to support programs for individuals working in the industry. It does not make sense when our city has more debt than the entire state of Tennessee and spends more than \$400 million annually on servicing that debt, to obligate any of our city's general funds when we have a Convention and Visitors Center (CVC) budget which regularly runs a surplus.

There are many forms that could take - subsidized health insurance, subsidized parking within the MCC, co-op or pooled investment services (modeled after programs like Farm-Credit Mid-America), downpayment assistance, and similar.