SCOTT BURROUGHS FOR ASHEVILLE CITY COUNCIL

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Questions from Friends of the Woods (of the Save the Woods campaign)

[Asheville, NC, 2/28/2026]

Last year, UNC Asheville announced a plan to deforest nearly 45 acres of woodland on a section of its campus that sits within the Five Points neighborhood to build a 5,000-seat semi-pro soccer stadium, 300–450 market-rate housing units, 1,400+ parking spaces, and roughly 30,000–50,000 square feet of retail. Friends of the Woods is a grassroots organization of concerned citizens from across Asheville and beyond, formed to oppose this development and fight to protect the woods — among the largest still standing in the city — for future generations.

1. The movement to save the UNCA woods has broad community support and over 16,500 signatures. What is your position on these citizens' campaign to save the woods?

I stand with Save the Woods and strongly believe that UNCA should pursue Millennial Campus developments on other plots of land and invest in the woods. The woods are an educational, environmental, and community asset. With the sustained community opposition it's abundantly clear that the current soccer stadium proposal doesn't serve the university's, neighborhood's, or environment's best interests.

2. The university has kept its neighbors and local governments at arms-length in its quest to develop the UNCA urban woods, unwilling to work with the community to develop alternative plans. Would you work to persuade the university that local input must be respected? How?

I've been leading by example on this front. The Community Visioning Workshop which I helped organize and run last August was an example of the type of community engagement that UNCA should be running. As a member of the American Institute of Architects and the Urban Land Institute, I know that many local and national professionals would gladly donate their time and expertise to help the university in this process if they would only open the invitation.

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While UNC Asheville is part of the UNC system and not directly governed by the City, it operates within our community and depends on our infrastructure. I would push for a formal city–university working group, facilitated public design charrettes, and a memorandum of understanding that sets expectations for transparency, environmental review, and neighborhood compatibility. My campaign is motivated in part by my experience working with community members. I hope to empower local neighborhoods and communities in this and other

3. Asheville has less public park space than peer cities, so the destruction of 45 acres of green space would hit residents particularly hard. What would you do to increase access to the outdoors and green space?

Asheville lags peer cities in park acreage per resident. At council, I will prioritize acquiring small infill parcels for pocket parks, expanding greenway connectivity, and using bond funds and conservation dollars to permanently protect key urban forests and regrow our canopy. The current debacle of the Tree Fee In Lieu fund where half of a million dollars are sitting in a fund without an ordinance that allows the city or our urban forester to spend those funds is symptomatic of leadership that is often more interested in signaling virtue than executing on outcomes. Parks and green spaces are

4. The university argues that it needs to build in order to adapt and grow, while neighbors argue that this is possible without destroying priceless natural resources and amenities. How would you work to navigate the goals and desires of multiple stakeholders in situations like these?

It starts with listening and level setting. The University's pressures are real and symptomatic of national trends. So are the pressures that everyday neighbors feel from elected and appointed officials who act as if they are unaccountable to the citizenry. Too often we see fully formed proposals presented as done deals without community input. I advocate for collaborative planning processes where financial feasibility, environmental impact, and community benefit are evaluated together. A key aspect of my platform is for Community Benefit Agreements to be a mandatory part of any development applying for a variance or special dispensation from council. These will make sure that locals are brought in early in the process and developers can be held to account for promises made in the engagement process. The further benefit is that these agreements can be used as baselines for communities when they face outside pressures.

5. The university's soccer stadium proposal for the woods is budgeted at $58 million, with $29 million coming from unspecified public funds. Do you support public funds

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being used on projects the public opposes? As a steward of public funds, how would you balance the needs of the community with the goals of public institutions and private entities?

Public dollars require public trust. I cannot support allocating public funds toward the current soccer stadium proposal, especially since this proposal has not provided any economic or environmental impact studies. As a steward of public funds, I would insist on clear public benefit metrics, full transparency about funding sources, and demonstrated community support before committing taxpayer dollars.

6. The UNCA woods are a vital part of our urban green infrastructure. The 20,000 trees that make up the forest sequester 75.5 tons of carbon and divert 2.2 million gallons of stormwater every year. Their shade measurably lowers temperatures in the city. With up to 40% of our tree canopy damaged by Tropical Storm Helene, how would you protect our existing tree canopy and grow our urban green infrastructure?

With up to 40% of canopy damaged by Tropical Storm Helene, preservation must come first. I would strengthen our tree protection ordinance, require replacement ratios that reflect canopy loss, fund post-storm replanting at scale, and prioritize native species. Urban forests reduce heat, manage stormwater, and sequester carbon but right now the City of Asheville has funds sitting in the Fee In Lieu fund, but no plan and no ordinances to allow allocation of those funds. Regrowing our urban canopy is climate policy and fiscal policy at the same time.

7. The university's stated goals in this proposed development are to gain revenue, increase enrollment, and raise its profile. How would you propose to help the university accomplish its goals while preserving our urban forests and stewarding a positive relationship with the citizens of Asheville?

Revenue and enrollment growth do not require deforestation. The university could pursue strategic infill on already disturbed land, partner on mixed-use redevelopment, expand academic programming tied to Asheville's strengths, and leverage its identity as a sustainability leader. I've detailed options for that kind of development in the Community Visioning Workshop Initial Report available at https://www.thislandstudio.com/uncawoods This initial report is merely a suggestion and there are more ways that the university can partner with the city and the community to accomplish its goals in win win outcomes that connect the university to its city rather than separating it.

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8. There's money in the bank specifically aimed at buying land to preserve it. Are you willing to get the city on board with putting that cash towards a community urban forest conservancy?

Yes. We should explore deploying all the resources at our diposal for a community urban forest conservancy that protects critical tracts while allowing thoughtful educational and recreational use. That is a forward-looking investment in resilience and quality of life.

Questions from the Five Points Neighborhood Association
5 Points Neighborhood Association is an organization whose goal is to protect the beauty, safety and stability of our neighborhood. We strive for friendly streets where pedestrians, pets, and bicyclists can safely coexist with vehicles. Five Points Neighborhood Association wants to make Asheville a better place to live by starting at home, in our own urban traditional neighborhood, so close to downtown that we can hear a concert in the street.

1. Many residents are concerned about the pace and nature of commercial development in Asheville. What steps can Council take to protect the integrity of its in-city neighborhoods in the face of commercial development pressures?

Our current Unified Development Ordinance was adopted in 1997 and since its inception has been modified nearly 300 times. It is not serving the people of this century's Asheville. Just look at your rent check, or tax bill. We need reforms that make a clear distinction between our neighborhoods and our commercial corridors. Both need to grow to meet the demand. For our neighborhoods, we need to adopt missing middle housing which allows for the kind of historic developments and mixed housing of neighborhoods such as Five Points. Along our commercial corridors, we need to scrap the current suburban-leaning zoning districts we currently have and provide flexibility for design professionals. Our council and development department need to enforce design compatibility standards, require meaningful community engagement and community benefits agreements, and strengthen the impact fees that mean developers pay for the infrastructure improvements needed for their development's success.

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2. What is your position on the City's pattern of converting residential housing to business/commercial use?

Buildings and the needs of the community change over time. There are cases where conversion can be the right answer and help preserve the character of our city and there are cases where commercializing existing housing only worsens our housing crunch.

3. What steps can Council take to encourage pedestrian traffic and make it safer?

Invest in sidewalks, traffic calming, protected bike lanes, raised crosswalks, and better lighting. We must design for people first and complete streets, not just vehicles.

4. Broadway Street's current four-lane design prioritizes vehicle speed over safety and neighborhood connectivity, leaving pedestrians and bicyclists exposed and underserved. How can Broadway (North from Lexington to Riverside) be redesigned to slow traffic, add safe crossings, and better protect pedestrians and bicyclists?

Broadway should undergo a road diet. We have seen the positive safety outcomes that have come from that work on Merrimon. We should also remember what a difficult task of communication and collaboration that was, especially with NCDOT being the lead. Center turn lanes, protected bike lanes, signage, markings, street trees, and frequent raised crossings are all tools in the tool box. Curb extensions, parallel parking, and other traffic calming would slow speeds and reconnect the neighborhood fabric across Broadway.

5. Do you believe that the current noise ordinance adequately protects residential neighborhoods? If not, what changes would you propose?

It needs review. Residents deserve predictable quiet hours and enforceable decibel standards, especially near residential zones. Enforcement must be consistent and transparent.

6. How can Council encourage Ingles to be a better corporate citizen, particularly with regard to its unused and underused holdings (Charlotte St, Innsbruck Mall, Merrimon @ Osborne)?

I am working on an act to allow communities to take a proactive role in addressing derelict properties. It is called the Community Ownership & Rehabilitation Enablement Act. See attached draft language and my recent Op Ed for more information. This is a long term fix. In the short term, mobilizing our community is the best way. On March 11th I hope you all can

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attend the inaugural meeting or sign up for the mailing list to participate in the Woolsey Development Improvement Project. a community led project to develop the abandoned buildings at 500 merrimon

Wednesday, 3/11/26

5:30-7pm

@Thrive Coworking, 2nd floor

in the grove Arcade, 1 page ave.

Link here to website

7. Boards and Commissions have been "paused" due to staffing concerns. How do you feel about that? Do you think public input, especially from Boards and Commissions is important, and if so, how will you get them reinstated?

The work of Boards and Commissions needs to be tied to actual implementable policies. Otherwise it is a big waste of time for city staff and more importantly the citizens who volunteer their time and expertise for all of us. Asheville has a whole library of studies and proposals. What it needs is collaborative leadership to implement the best of what our community puts forth.

8. Last year, Asheville lost its longstanding Tree City USA status. How do you feel about that? What do you think the City should do about this?

That loss is a shame. Reinstating Tree City USA status should be an early goal, paired with finishing writing the fee in lieu tree ordinance, finishing the urban forestry master plan, empowering communities to regrow our canopy and stronger protections for our existing trees.

9. Several years ago, Asheville residents fought hard to save 13 beautifully crafted homes on Charlotte Street that served as affordable housing for 70+ people, most of whom worked in the tourism and service industry, and other needed areas in the city. There is an axiom in sustainability that says: "The greenest building is the one already built." How do you feel about preserving existing homes for affordable housing?

I strongly agree with the principle that the greenest building is the one already built. Adaptive reuse and preservation of existing affordable housing stock should be prioritized through incentives, acquisition funds, and community conservatorship.

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10. Asheville prides itself on its architecture. Do you think the current movement of 5 Over 1 buildings that are going up all over town and in the county hurts our reputation?

Let's not kid ourselves, Asheville's wonderful and comparatively intact architecture is a by-product of the boom and bust cycles that we've historically gone through as a city. The booms create wonderful buildings and the busts mean no one has the money to tear them down. Five over ones are a by-product of the current building codes, building technology, and labor costs. As a professional architect that has designed everything from warehouses to luxury hotels, I am firmly aware of how economics and entitlements shape our built environment.

Asheville City Council doesn't have much control over macroeconomics and the price of lumber, but we do have control over our zoning. The big behemoths like the recently completed Wyre building are the outcome of restrictive and inflexible zoning that favors large lot development. We need to reform our UDO so that there is flexibility for developers, architects and engineers to meet the demand for housing in ways that fit within our existing urban fabric. That means adopting the Missing Middle Housing Plan, simplifying our zoning districts and overlays, and moving to floor to area ratio restrictions in commercial zoning districts rather than current envelope restrictions that favor suburban sprawl even in our historic urban neighborhoods. We also need to preserve the architectural heritage that we do have by allowing for community conservatorship of neglected properties and return underutilized city-owned properties like the fire station on Merrimon back to productive use through leases or public private partnerships.

Thank you for reading through my answers. I look forward to working with you all

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