

Equity and Progress in Charlottesville

(E.P.I.C.) Platform – 2017

We, the members of E.P.I.C., believe that Charlottesville can do better, and we demand better of our elected officials in serving the public and in meeting the needs of our community.

We have a positive, inclusive vision for our society and for our democracy, one in which all of our residents have the opportunity to thrive and to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. We challenge local decision-making bodies (from City Council to the School Board to the Commonwealth Attorney's Office and beyond) to take bold steps to advance equal opportunity, eliminate racial and economic disparities, strengthen the middle class, protect and improve our neighborhoods, safeguard our vital public institutions, and enhance the quality of life for all who call Charlottesville home. Bold change is not only possible, it also reflects the political sensibilities of the Charlottesville electorate – note that a majority of Charlottesville voters endorsed the candidate of political revolution during the 2016 Democratic presidential primary, over the candidate promising to build on the status quo.

In debates about the future of our community, we seek less in the way of political posturing and empty rhetoric and more in the way of constructive dialogue and concrete change. We pledge to recruit and support candidates for City offices who are committed to meaningful engagement with local residents, community groups and neighborhood associations - as well as regional partners like UVa, PVCC and Albemarle County - to achieve the outcomes outlined below, relying on evidence-based and participatory decision-making and smart fiscal choices. Most of all, we believe, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once taught, that injustice anywhere - in our homes, communities, schools or workplaces - is a threat to justice everywhere, and that we all benefit when each of our neighbors has the opportunity to realize his or her highest potential.

Our vision for a Better Charlottesville is one that works collaboratively and proactively to effect change on three particular fronts:

1. Economic Opportunity and Quality of Life

- Improve economic and employment opportunities for all residents by increasing the availability of skilled trades jobs (and training for skilled trades jobs) so many more low-income families can join the middle class; by expanding the successful GO program and by working to produce and procure more goods and services locally, as recommended by the Orange Dot Project; and by championing a true Living Wage and increasing the number of local employers who are paying it.
- Promote mindful community growth and prevent gentrification of working-class neighborhoods by insisting that public or private development efforts protect neighborhood livability, honor the historic fabric of our community, support racial and economic diversity, and allow longstanding residents to remain in their neighborhoods and upgrade their homes.

- Increase the supply of quality affordable housing for lower-income, working poor, elderly, disabled and homeless residents by building at least 1,000 new units of such housing throughout the city (through an expanded Charlottesville Affordable Housing Fund) and by revitalizing our public housing neighborhoods in accordance with PHAR's Positive Vision for Redevelopment; ensure that lower-income residents have top priority for jobs, job training and contracting opportunities created by these new investments.
- Create a 'greener' Charlottesville through enhanced public transportation, bicycle/pedestrian access, renewable energy/energy efficiency, green space preservation, tree planting, and other such initiatives.

2. Social and Racial Equity

- Pursue equal justice and end mass incarceration by eliminating disproportionate minority contact throughout the criminal justice system, by reforming drug laws and school disciplinary practices, and by dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline.
- Elevate the quality of our schools and the academic achievement of all students, especially those students of low socio-economic status who are currently falling behind.
- Promote equality and combat discrimination in all forms by invigorating the ability of the Human Rights Commission to address systemic inequities and to enforce anti-discrimination ordinances; by ensuring that all City departments and agencies (including the schools and the police) are furthering equal opportunity and countering bias; and by protecting vulnerable populations from hate crimes.
- Improve social equity and community resilience by strengthening social and family supports and by eliminating racial disparities in health and mental health outcomes.

3. Open, Accountable Government

- Reinvigorate public engagement with local government by adopting new strategies that encourage and enable residents to play a more meaningful and participatory role in City decision-making and in envisioning the future of our community; by adopting City Council meeting procedures that adhere to the highest levels of free expression and governmental responsiveness and accountability; and by instituting transparent accountability processes that ensure that all City programs are regularly evaluated for measurable effectiveness and impact.
- Improve the quality of our democracy by reducing the corrupting influence of private special-interest money in local elections; by instituting campaign finance reforms, potentially to include public funding of campaigns; and by making it more possible for working-class and lower-income residents to serve in elected or appointed offices.