Candidate Name: Farris Johnson

Email farrisfordistrict20@gmail.com

Campaign Website votefarris.org

Each of the following questions includes a 100 word limit

Briefly describe why you are seeking public office:

In the wake of County Council’s fight over the 1996 anti-LGBTQ+ resolution, I decided to run in District 20 in order to ensure better representative for folks from all walks of life. My campaign is marked by a commitment to affordable housing, transit equity, sustainability, accessibility, public safety, & citizen empowerment.

Government works best when it is fully transparent & when all residents are engaged. To this end, I am committed to unifying our neighbors around the common good & fighting every day to ensure that Greenville County is a place where all people can thrive.

Briefly describe a significant accomplishment that would reflect your ability to lead our community:

At this time last year, I was bartending. I never imagined I would run for office. However, since filing as a candidate back in March, I’ve built a growing team of volunteers and activists with the Farris For 20 campaign. My campaign is a testament to how I would lead Greenville: we’re diverse, we’re committed to people power, we’re resourceful & intrepid.

Real change starts at the grassroots: on front porches, in churches, on the streets, & in break rooms. Our leaders should never doubt the power of a citizen with a clipboard and a cause. I certainly won't.

If elected, after your first 12 months on Council, what do you hope is your most significant achievement?

My commitment to public safety means my top priorities will be assessing the bloated budget of the Greenville County Sheriff’s Office, reinvesting that money to our community (particularly in the areas of affordable housing, transit equity, and health services), establishing Citizen Oversight for the Greenville County Sheriff’s Office, and instating a Public Safety Inspector’s Office.
Greenville County is home to nearly 500 nonprofits, ranging from small community centers to large institutions that provide health care, housing, food support, education, arts programming, and so much more. Most recently available data show that nearly 90,000 people in our state are employed in the nonprofit sector and one in three South Carolinians volunteer in a nonprofit organization. Nonprofits and the foundations, companies, and individuals that support them are vital to Greenville County.

Tell us about one of Greenville County’s non-profits that you think is doing important work in your community, and what you have done to support this organization’s mission?

Well, I’m a bit partial. I work for Loaves & fishes (L&F) and know that they are fulfilling a critical need in our community. L&F rescues food from grocery stores, restaurants, and farmers that would otherwise be wasted and delivers this food to 100+ agencies in Greenville County. Our collaborative nature enables us to be incredibly responsive during this economic crisis. Currently, I serve as the Development Manager at L&F. Daily, I strive to tell the L&F story to our community in order to inspire volunteers and donors to engage our mission.

How could County Council and Greenville non-profit community better support one another in our shared goal of improving the lives of people in Greenville County?

First things first: County Council must not only listen to the input of non-profits, but they must actively solicit this input. We have seen this year that the public, including our non-profits, has been all but entirely shut out of County Council meetings. This is not only undemocratic, but during a public health and unemployment crisis, it is reckless. County Council must be more transparent with the non-profit sector, engage non-profits to learn more about what resources the community needs, and be responsive to this information.

Housing

What would you do to encourage the production of more affordable homes for these families? What would you do to support to local Affordable Housing developers, including community organizations and private developers (e.g., incentives such as density/parking bonuses, reduced fees)?

Ensuring affordable housing for our neighbors is a moral obligation. Housing is a human right. Additionally, lack of housing is an issue of public health, public safety, & economic development. We need to ensure affordable housing by:
- incentivizing building by providing tax-credits, density bonuses, & expediting processes
- addressing zoning laws that don’t make efficient use of land, don’t allow for multi-family developments, & don’t allow for density
- giving a yearly budget line item of at least 2 million to the Greenville Housing Fund
- exploring an affordable housing bond to get public support
- destigmatizing low-income housing

Transit

Describe the role you believe transit plays in our community’s future growth and success and what role should County

Public transportation is a necessary component for a growing
Council play in supporting public transit demands?

county. By investing in Greenlink: 1) we will provide our community with a reliable workforce, 2) we will increase our sustainability, and, most importantly, 3) we can connect our neighbors to the resources they need.

Public transit provides economic growth, reduces air pollution, increases fuel efficiency, relieves traffic congestion, increases mobility for seniors, and provides opportunity & freedom for folks from all walks of life.

By fully-funding Greenlink to expand our fleet, routes, and service times, we can help all our neighbors experience all our county has to offer.

Growth

How will you balance the interests of private property owners with the community's broader vision for how to manage growth across the county (i.e. the future land use map)?

This is a great question because it's live right now in County Council!

Urban sprawl is steadily creeping into unzoned, rural areas of the county — threatening not only the landscape of our rural areas, but the way of life so many residents. Fortunately, we already have a game plan to encourage smart growth.

Currently, there is a proposed ordinance that would establish minimum lot sizes for new subdivisions in unzoned parts of the county. This ordinance would seek to be consistent and clear regarding section 3.1 of The Comprehensive plan. I am in favor of establishing rural subdivision controls.

Arts

How do you believe the County can further support the arts now – during our economic crisis – and in the future?

In a time when our county has taken a tremendous hit economically due to Covid-19's impact on tourism, our children are adjusting to the new reality of virtual learning, our nation is grappling with systemic racism, and our families are struggling with their finances and health (mental and physical), I can't imagine a better time to invest in the arts.

By investing in accessible & safe public works of art, art education, theater, music, and our museums we are investing in life-giving works for our community, & these will not just bring economic benefit, but also much needed joy.

Municipalities

What steps will you take to ensure open communication between these diverse entities, many of whom are independent of Greenville County Council governance authority?

Open and honest communication is the key. As a County Councilmember, not only will I expand times for public comment, but I am committed to hosting regular town halls and "office hours" to meet with the leaders of our municipalities, our communities, and other concerned citizens. I will always be transparent with our residents about the agenda of County Council, and as a public servant, I will
Citizen Engagement

Greenville County Council represents more than 10% of the population of South Carolina. With that comes an incredible diversity of thought and experiences shared by our citizens. Do you seek input from people with different perspectives? In what way and to whom do you turn for input? One of the priorities of the Greenville Nonprofit Alliance is an increased involvement of non-profit leaders and board members in shaping policy at the local level. If elected, how will you ensure local non-profit leaders have the opportunity to provide a voice in the decisions being made throughout the county?

Engagement, empowerment, and representation are the reasons I entered this race. My campaign is built on the premise of empowering folks to make their voices heard, especially those folks that have felt left out of the political process.

When addressing issues, I seek the voices of those closest to the problem. Often, non-profits are able to help provide context for these voices or assist in identifying the needs of these constituents. My goal is to amplify a diverse & inclusive set of voices from Greenville County.