

City of Fairfax 2026 Mayoral and Council Candidates Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Thomas D. "Tom" Peterson

Office Sought: Mayor

Date Submitted: 09-15-26

1. Opening Statement

I am running for Mayor because I love this city and care deeply about its future. Fairfax has tremendous opportunities to remain a great place to live and become even better. But that will depend on important decisions and collaboration over the next few years among our community, the City, the City Council, and our many private and community partners.

I believe Fairfax needs a Mayor who is experienced, skilled, patient and trusted to help people with different perspectives work together to achieve what is best for our city. Serving as a City Council member has taught me that there is no substitute for experience as an elected official. The decisions become very real. People depend on you—their safety, finances, neighborhoods, children and future. I have cast more than 200 votes affecting our residents, including many difficult ones, and I understand both the responsibility Council members carry and the support a Mayor can provide through active facilitation and collaboration.

I also bring 44 years of experience across government, business, nonprofit leadership and higher education, including work at the White House, U.S. Senate and EPA. Much of my career has involved helping diverse people and organizations work through difficult public decisions.

Through my service on eight regional boards and commissions, I also understand that Fairfax is part of a larger regional community requiring strong coordination and collaboration.

From all of this, I am ready to serve as Mayor on day one, and I ask for your support.

2. Development & Quality of Life

The City is experiencing redevelopment in areas such as Northfax, Kamp Washington, Old Town, and along the Route 50 corridor. What level and type of development do you believe the City can realistically accommodate without negatively affecting residents' quality of life? In addition, if an existing unresolved development was sold to a data center developer, would you approve this application?

I fully support redevelopment. Fairfax needs continued investment, but redevelopment should be selective, properly focused and shaped through meaningful community involvement so that it strengthens our city without overwhelming it.

Commercial redevelopment should be a priority and housing should not automatically come first. Fairfax has fallen behind in commercial development, and as a small, largely built-out city, we have limited land available for future redevelopment. Converting viable commercial sites to housing or other uses can permanently reduce opportunities to strengthen our commercial economy and tax base.

We also need housing, particularly housing at different price points, but it should respond to demonstrated needs and be considered together with commercial development, traffic, infrastructure, schools, City finances, the environment and neighborhood character. There is a place for higher-density mixed-use development, but not everywhere or at every scale.

The current Small Area Plan review gives us an opportunity to identify clearer community-based goals, assess cumulative impacts and consider a broader range of choices.

A conventional large-scale data center would be difficult to accommodate in Fairfax. Smaller urban-scale or "edge" data centers may eventually offer possibilities, but only if their energy, noise, heat, infrastructure, design and community impacts can be responsibly addressed.

3. Budget & Priorities

The City has limited resources and cannot fund every worthwhile project. What is one program, project, or spending priority you would be willing to delay, reduce, or reject—and why? In addition, please add your thoughts about the general retail sales tax not to exceed 1% to provide revenue solely for eligible capital projects involving the construction or renovation of schools, public transportation purposes, or both that will appear on the November 3 ballot.

The City Council inherited a five-year Capital Improvement Program exceeding \$600 million. The potential property-tax impact of financing projects at that scale is not realistic for our community. Major capital projects are therefore an area where I am prepared to approve, delay, reduce, redesign or reject spending based on assessment of public benefit, alternatives, financial feasibility and community need.

We have already shown there can be better choices. With the Willard-Sherwood Health and Community Center, the City Council changed the financial approach and reduced the projected taxpayer impact by more than 55% while preserving the project and its services.

I support the proposed sales tax of up to 1% for eligible school capital needs. The roughly \$220 million school renovation program approved by voters has been estimated to add about \$1,400-\$1,500 annually to the property-tax bill of an average homeowner if financed primarily through property taxes. The estimated additional sales-tax cost to an average household is roughly \$200-\$300 annually—a dramatic difference in household impact.

This illustrates why the financial design of a major project can be as important as its physical design. New revenue should not replace careful cost control and fiscal discipline.

4. Taxes & City Spending

Fairfax City has a relatively high level of services for a small municipality, but residents are also facing rising costs. How would you balance maintaining the services residents expect with keeping property taxes and other local costs affordable?

The three largest areas of cost in our budget are schools, capital improvement projects, and City services and operations. We need to manage all three carefully while protecting the services that make Fairfax a strong community.

Capital projects are one of the largest and most manageable long-term cost variables. We need better alternatives analysis, cost control, prioritization and phasing so that we do not take on excessive debt and debt-service costs that drive taxes higher.

Schools account for nearly half of the City budget and are essential. I do not support downgrading educational quality. Over the longer term, however, the City should work closely with Fairfax County Public

Schools to identify opportunities to control costs and improve efficiency while protecting educational outcomes.

For City services and operations, continuous improvement should become part of how we work. I strongly supported the City's Finance and Operational Efficiency Review, and the City Manager has also added a performance and innovation function to help identify better ways to deliver services.

This work should involve the community. Fiscal responsibility means continually asking whether residents are receiving the best possible value for their money while protecting the services they need most.

5. Regional Cooperation & Development

Projects in neighboring jurisdictions can significantly impact the City (e.g., the AT&T redevelopment). How would you collaborate with regional partners to manage these impacts, and how would you resolve situations where the City's interests differ from theirs? In addition, please add your thoughts about FCPS and City partnership review.

Regional collaboration is essential for Fairfax. I serve on eight regional boards and commissions and have seen how jurisdictions can work together to obtain funding, coordinate investments and solve problems that cannot be addressed effectively by acting alone.

When a neighboring project such as the AT&T redevelopment could significantly affect Fairfax, I would engage early, establish the facts and projected impacts, identify common interests and work directly with the neighboring jurisdiction toward practical solutions. Where our interests differ, the Mayor should advocate clearly for Fairfax while maintaining the relationships necessary to reach workable outcomes.

I believe the City's long-standing partnership with Fairfax County Public Schools has been highly beneficial and has helped provide our students with excellent educational opportunities. Any review of the partnership should begin from that positive foundation and focus on identifying updates or improvements that could make a strong relationship even better.

Schools represent almost half of the City budget, so it is reasonable to periodically examine costs, efficiency, accountability, facilities, governance and long-term planning. I would approach that work without a predetermined outcome, with educational quality first, reliable analysis, and meaningful participation by families, educators and the broader community.

6. Major Projects & Infrastructure

The City is making significant investments in infrastructure and facilities, including the Willard-Sherwood Health & Community Center. What criteria should City Council use to determine which major projects receive funding when resources are limited?

Major improvement projects require diligent management. I am prepared to approve major projects when they are warranted by demonstrated community needs, meaningful public involvement and careful assessment of the key issues at stake. I am equally prepared to redesign, postpone or reconsider projects when that process shows a better course is in the community interest.

I have demonstrated both approaches as a City Council member—supporting important investments when the case is strong while pressing for reconsideration when costs, impacts or alternatives require another

look.

Projects should be evaluated against clear community goals and realistic alternatives, including public benefit, total cost, effects on taxes and debt, outside funding, operating and maintenance costs, infrastructure, environmental and neighborhood impacts, cost of living and quality of life. The process should be systematic, transparent and highly participatory.

The Willard-Sherwood Health and Community Center demonstrates why flexibility matters. Rather than accepting the inherited financial design or abandoning an important project, the City Council changed the approach and reduced the projected taxpayer impact by more than 55%.

The Mayor should help the City Council work collaboratively through these tradeoffs and reach decisions that best serve the community.

7. Virginia Constitutional Amendments

The November 3 ballot will include three proposed amendments to the Virginia Constitution concerning reproductive freedom, marriage rights, and voting rights after felony incarceration. Do you support or oppose these amendments, and why? As a Fairfax City Council member, how would your views on these constitutional questions influence the way you lead and represent residents who may strongly disagree with you?

I support all three proposed constitutional amendments. They address different issues—reproductive freedom, marriage rights and restoration of voting rights after felony incarceration—but each would provide greater certainty by placing these protections directly in the Virginia Constitution.

I also recognize that people have different perspectives on some of these issues, including deeply held personal views. I respect those differences. In many cases, people who personally disagree with a particular choice nevertheless support the right of others to reach their own conclusions.

As Mayor, I would represent the entire community, including residents who strongly disagree with me. These constitutional questions will be decided by Virginia voters, and the underlying policies are largely outside the authority of Fairfax City government. Our responsibility locally is to follow the law and implement applicable requirements fairly.

I think it is important not to allow disagreements over state or national issues to prevent us from working together on the local issues that are the subject of our collaboration—schools, public safety, taxes, development, transportation, City services and the quality of life of our community.

8. Civility & Governance

City Council decisions can generate strong disagreements among residents and elected officials. What specific steps will you take to maintain a civil, respectful, and productive Council—even when you strongly disagree with another Council member?

Disagreements do not need to result in division. They are often the product of different perspectives about how to achieve a common outcome, such as strengthening the community and avoiding harm. When people are working toward common objectives, it is healthy for them to bring different ideas forward.

As Mayor, I would actively facilitate that process. Every City Council member should have an equal opportunity to be heard. We should identify where differences exist and why, establish the facts, and consider whether alternatives or additional information can help clarify the best way forward. I would also work to keep discussion focused on issues rather than personalities or motives.

The same principle applies to the community. Residents should be involved early enough for their participation to influence decisions, with meaningful choices and alternatives available for consideration.

I do not believe good government requires everyone to agree. We simply need to agree that we will work together. That means listening carefully, treating one another respectfully, explaining our decisions honestly and continuing to collaborate after difficult votes.

Creating and sustaining that kind of constructive environment is one of the most important responsibilities I would bring to serving as Mayor.

9. Accountability & Ethics

How can Fairfax City residents, rather than any political party or special interest group, hold you accountable, and what will you do to ensure transparency in your decisions and follow-through on your commitments?

Elections are ultimately where residents judge the performance of elected officials, but accountability should occur continuously—not simply every two years. Residents should be able to see whether an elected official remains focused on community priorities, follows through on commitments and produces meaningful results.

For me, that begins with showing up, listening and being transparent. I have maintained 100% attendance at City Council meetings, votes and planning sessions. I also played an important role in raising the need for the City's first Code of Ethics and continued advocating for it through its adoption this month without objection. The Code includes best-practice expectations involving conflicts of interest and recusal.

As Mayor, I would support clear priorities, accessible public information, meaningful participation before major decisions are made, and regular reporting on important initiatives where measurable outcomes are practical. I would also explain the reasoning behind difficult decisions rather than simply announcing the result.

I have no political party endorsement or formal party affiliation. My responsibility is to the people of Fairfax. The question I try to bring to major City decisions is straightforward: What is best for the people of Fairfax? Residents should hold me accountable to that standard.

10. What do you love about the City and your final thoughts?

The City of Fairfax has retained an environment, culture, setting and way of life that make it a special place to build a life and raise a family. My family and I have called Fairfax home since 2002, and what makes this community special should not be taken for granted.

I love that this is a place I look forward to coming home to when I have been away. I feel good about staying because there are so many things to do right here at home. I am proud to tell people I live here.

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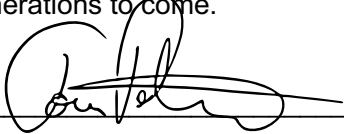
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Most of all, I value the people. So many residents contribute their time, ideas and energy to making Fairfax better. I want us to give them every opportunity to help choose our future rather than feel that the future is simply happening around them.

I want people to feel confident about their future here—not futile or as though something important is slipping away. We have true neighbors in Fairfax, and often our best friends are right next door.

That sense of community is worth protecting. I want to help keep Fairfax a place people are proud to call home for generations to come.

Signature:  _____ Date: September 15, 2026