

City of Fairfax 2026 Mayoral and Council Candidates Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Kelly M. O'Brien



Office Sought: City Council

Date Submitted: 09/07/2026

1. Opening Statement - under 300 words (All opening statements will appear in print in the October edition of The Fairfax Independent)

I'm running for Fairfax City Council because experience, collaboration, and a real commitment to this community matter. I bring all three. Fairfax has been my home for 15 years. What I love is that it's still a place where people show up for each other, local businesses know their customers by name, and one person can actually make a difference.

If you care about your community, you should be willing to roll up your sleeves and help. That's led me to serve on the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, work with the Old Town Fairfax Business Association, volunteer at community events, support local businesses, and create Fairfax 411 to help residents understand what's happening in their local government.

That involvement has also made me a familiar face. People stop me around the City to ask questions or share what's on their mind, whether I'm at a festival, the grocery store, or the gym. I don't always have the answer on the spot, but I know how to find it and who to ask. That's the kind of conduit I want to be on Council: approachable, responsive, and honest when I don't know something yet.

I'm running because I want to put my experience to work for this community and help it move forward. I bring nearly 20 years of professional local government and planning experience, and I know this community. I understand how local government actually works, and I know good ideas don't mean much without follow-through.

Fairfax is my home. I've spent years finding ways to contribute, and I'd be honored to continue that as a member of City Council. But I'll keep finding ways to serve this community either way.

City of Fairfax 2026 Mayoral and Council Candidates Questionnaire

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2. Development & Quality of Life (under 200 words)

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?

Fairfax can handle more development, but where it goes matters as much as how much of it there is. I support concentrating redevelopment in the areas we've already identified for change through our Small Area Plans and Comprehensive Plan, not pushing that pressure into established neighborhoods.

Property owners have a right to develop their land under the zoning we've adopted. The harder cases are proposals asking for substantially more than that. That's when Council has to look closely at impacts on neighbors, transportation, infrastructure, and whether the project actually gives something back to the public. Special exceptions should be the exception, not a routine workaround for standards we set on purpose.

I won't commit in advance to approving a hypothetical data center. I'd evaluate the real application, including the site, zoning, power and infrastructure demands, noise, environmental impact, effects on neighbors, economic benefit, and how it fits our long-range plans. As a planner, I've learned to review the application and the evidence before making a land-use decision.

3. Budget & Priorities (under 200 words)

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.

One place I'd scrutinize is spending on outside consultants. They can bring real expertise, but before signing off on that spending, I'd ask whether existing staff can reasonably do the work. When they can, I'd rather use the talent we already have and put limited dollars toward core services and infrastructure.

I support the 1% sales tax for school capital improvements. Supporting a new tax isn't popular, but our schools have real facility needs that have to get paid for somehow, and a sales tax spreads that cost beyond City property owners to everyone who shops and does business here.

The City's financial advisor estimates the tax would generate roughly \$13-14 million a year, legally restricted to school capital and public transportation projects. These needs are going to cost money regardless. The real question is how we pay for them fairly.

City of Fairfax 2026 Mayoral and Council Candidates Questionnaire

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4. Taxes & City Spending *(under 200 words)*

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?

Fairfax delivers an impressive level of service for a city our size, and our staff does it well while managing an ever-growing list of demands. But keeping taxes manageable can't just mean asking staff to keep doing more with less.

Council has to set priorities and recognize that every new program or service comes with a cost, whether that's funding, staff time, or both. We should weigh those ongoing costs before adding commitments, and make sure we're actually maintaining what we already have.

We also need to strengthen the other side of the ledger. A healthy commercial tax base takes pressure off residential property taxes. Supporting existing businesses, attracting new investment, encouraging the right kind of redevelopment along our commercial corridors, and making City processes easier to navigate all help with that.

I won't promise lower taxes without saying what would get cut to pay for it. My job would be to weigh those tradeoffs carefully and make sure residents are getting real value for what they pay.

5. Regional Cooperation & Development *(under 200 words)*

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.

Local government doesn't stop at our borders. Development, transportation, schools, stormwater, and infrastructure decisions in neighboring jurisdictions can have real effects on Fairfax residents.

I've worked across jurisdictional lines professionally, and the most effective approach is early, ongoing communication. That means engaging regional partners before decisions are final, sharing information, flagging impacts, and advocating clearly for Fairfax. When our interests differ from theirs, we still have to maintain the relationship and look for practical solutions while representing our community.

On the School Services Agreement, I'd go into any review carefully and without a predetermined outcome. Before advocating for changes, I'd want to actually understand what those changes mean financially and operationally for the City.

This is a long-running partnership between the City, the City School Board, Fairfax County, and FCPS, so it can't be evaluated from the City's side alone. A serious review means honest

City of Fairfax 2026 Mayoral and Council Candidates Questionnaire

Kelly M. O'Brien



conversation among all four parties about what's working, what isn't, and what any change would actually cost before deciding what comes next.

6. Major Projects & Infrastructure *(under 200 words)*

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?

I'd start with need. Is there a health or safety issue? Is existing infrastructure or a facility reaching the end of its life? How many people benefit? What does it cost us to wait? I'd also factor in available outside funding and how a project fits priorities the City has already committed to.

I want the full cost, not just the construction price. A new facility has to be operated, maintained, and staffed for decades, and that needs to be part of the conversation from day one.

We also have to weigh all our capital needs against each other. Saying yes to one project can mean another waits. There won't always be an easy answer, and reasonable people will prioritize differently. What matters is asking the right questions, being honest about the tradeoffs, and being able to explain to residents why we made the call we did.

7. Virginia Constitutional Amendments *(under 200 words)*

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?

As a voter, I'll make my own call on each of these, and I'm happy to say where I stand: I support all three. People should control decisions about their own bodies, adults should be free to marry who they choose, and people should get their right to vote back once they've returned to the community after incarceration.

As a candidate for City Council, though, it's just as important to be clear about how these issues relate to the job I'm seeking. City Council doesn't decide Virginia's laws on reproductive rights, marriage, or voting restoration. We're elected to make decisions about our City.

Some residents will agree with me, others won't, and I won't treat either group differently because of it. If elected, I'll represent all Fairfax residents, listen respectfully to people I disagree with, and work with Council members regardless of their politics. We don't have to agree on state or national issues to get local work done together.

City of Fairfax 2026 Mayoral and Council Candidates Questionnaire

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8. Civility & Governance *(under 200 words)*

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?

Council members won't always agree, and disagreement doesn't have to get personal. I'll come prepared, listen before responding, ask questions, and stick to the issue, not the person.

I also think Council members should be able to sit down, talk honestly about what matters most to each of us, and compare notes on what we're hearing from residents. We may be hearing different concerns, and sharing that gives everyone a fuller picture. From there, we can work through our differences and find a fair middle when we can.

I'm also willing to change my mind. If another Council member, a resident, or staff brings up something I hadn't considered, I'll reconsider my position.

Once a vote is over, it's over. We still have to work together on the next issue. Carrying grudges from one vote into the next, or burning meeting time arguing without moving the City forward, isn't a good use of anyone's time or money.

Residents should expect us to disagree sometimes. They should also expect us to treat each other with respect and get the work done.

9. Accountability & Ethics *(under 200 words)*

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?

At the end of the day, residents hold elected officials accountable at the ballot box. My job is to make sure they have the information and access to decide whether I've earned their vote again.

That means being accessible, explaining my votes and decisions, and following through on what I say I'll do. Residents shouldn't have to guess why I voted a certain way, or whether something I said I'd pursue actually went anywhere. If new information changes my position, I'll explain that too.

This is a nonpartisan office, and no party, endorsement, or special interest will decide my vote. I'll listen to different perspectives, but I'll make decisions based on what I think is best for Fairfax.

I take conflicts of interest seriously. If one comes up that requires disclosure or recusal, I'll handle it openly and follow the law. At the end of my term, residents can look at what I said, how I voted, and what actually got done, and decide for themselves whether I've earned another one.

City of Fairfax 2026 Mayoral and Council Candidates Questionnaire

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10. What do you love about the City and your final thoughts? *(under 200 words)*

There's a lot to love about Fairfax, from great schools, parks, and programs to dedicated City staff, strong neighborhood associations, and people who genuinely care about where they live.

I love our diversity and how it shows up in our restaurants, businesses, festivals, and schools. There's always something happening, but the city's still small enough that you run into someone you know almost every time you leave the house.

I also appreciate how engaged our residents are. They volunteer, serve on boards and commissions, show up at meetings, ask hard questions, and advocate for what matters to them. We don't always agree on what Fairfax should do next, but that involvement is part of what makes this City work.

Fairfax isn't perfect, and I don't expect it to be. But there's a lot more right with it than wrong, and that's worth remembering too. Whichever way this election goes, I'll keep finding ways to serve this community. That's not going to change.