

City of Fairfax 2026 Mayoral and Council Candidates Questionnaire

Candidate Name: María José Padmore

Office Sought: Fairfax City Council

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Candidates' opening statements will be published in alphabetical order and the entire questionnaire will be published on our website both as text and pdf with your signature.

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

RESPONSE (231 words):

Since settling in Fairfax City in 2002, my life has been dedicated to connecting people, cultures, and institutions. As a proud resident, immigrant, dedicated community organizer, and full-time public servant working in Human Services at the Fairfax County Health Department, I am running for City Council because our local government must reflect and uplift our diverse, multicultural community.

My professional career gives me firsthand insight into the systemic health, welfare, and infrastructure challenges our local neighborhoods are experiencing. True progress requires solutions-oriented leadership, inclusivity, and unwavering systemic accountability. My platform focuses on breaking down linguistic and structural barriers, ensuring every working family has a powerful voice in local governance. Additionally, my extensive background in labor advocacy—including serving as Director of SEIU Virginia 512 Fairfax, leading the historic unionization vote for nearly 12,000 county employees, and negotiating Virginia's first-ever public collective bargaining contract—demonstrates my proven ability to bring stakeholders together and deliver tangible, systemic results.

On the City Council, I will tackle the pressing issues on behalf of our community. My priorities include supporting our schools and teachers, expanding local housing protections and affordability, passing a Worker Retention ordinance to safeguard contracted service workers, and protecting collective bargaining options for city employees. I am also committed to ADA compliance across public spaces, expanding access to public transportation, and enacting equity-focused budgeting that ensures public dollars are distributed responsibly and effectively.

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?

RESPONSE (174 words):

Fairfax City must pursue balanced, human-scale redevelopment in Northfax, Kamp Washington, Old Town, and Route 50 that directly enhances community equity and aesthetics without pricing out residents. I advocate for smart, mixed-use zoning that prioritizes affordable housing production, pedestrian safety, and vibrant public spaces. We must ensure new projects incorporate rigorous environmental infrastructure and multi-modal transit options so that growth does not exacerbate traffic congestion or degrade our neighborhoods' distinct cultural character.

Regarding the sale of an unresolved development to a data center developer, I would **oppose** the application. As a Council member, my focus is protecting residential quality of life. Data centers demand massive energy loads, present severe noise pollution concerns from industrial cooling units, and generate very few permanent local jobs relative to their physical footprint. Our limited land should instead be preserved for mixed-income housing, green spaces, and retail environments that directly serve our families, support local workers, and foster a connected, walkable city ecosystem. Protecting our community from the negative externalities of heavy industrial infrastructure is vital to long-term sustainability.

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.

RESPONSE (177 words):

To manage our limited fiscal resources responsibly, I am willing to delay non-essential aesthetic capital improvements, such as decorative streetscaping and non-urgent cosmetic renovations to municipal facilities. Prioritizing core community needs means delaying secondary beautification projects until critical investments in public transit expansion, school infrastructure, and ADA compliance are fully realized.

Regarding the general retail sales tax referendum on the November 3 ballot, I **strongly support** this measure but believe the revenue should be utilized **solely** for our public schools. Our schools are the foundation of Fairfax City's future. A dedicated 1% sales tax is a highly effective mechanism to generate the robust, recurring revenue needed exclusively for vital school capital improvements and facility modernizations.

Crucially, because a sales tax captures revenue from visitors and shoppers from outside our municipality, it reduces the sole funding burden on local property owners. This allows us to build state-of-the-art educational environments for our children while keeping neighborhood residential property taxes stable and affordable for working families. I will advocate to ensure these funds are structurally firewalled strictly for educational excellence.

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?

RESPONSE (186 words):

Balancing high-quality services with property tax affordability requires transitioning from rigid, traditional spending models to data-driven, equity-focused budgeting. My full-time professional experience in Human Services with the Fairfax County Health Department gives me an intimate understanding of how public programs operate. I know exactly how to audit municipal spending to ensure tax dollars are targeted efficiently toward critical frontline wellness and public safety services while eliminating bureaucratic redundancies.

We can protect taxpayers by aggressively diversifying our revenue streams. This means fostering a pro-worker economic climate that attracts sustainable commercial retail, leveraging regional tourism, and actively pursuing state and federal infrastructure grants. Furthermore, we must also embrace cost-saving innovations. For example, rather than funding expensive, siloed translation programs, I will champion a mobile-first Language Access Hub. By utilizing modern digital tools and real-time interpretation software for city staff, we can provide comprehensive, multilingual public access across all departments at a fraction of the traditional cost.

My extensive experience negotiating historic, multi-million-dollar labor contracts proves I know how to balance complex budgets, find fiscal structural efficiencies, and protect public assets while keeping local costs affordable for working families.

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.

RESPONSE (167 words):

Cross-border projects like the AT&T redevelopment significantly impact Fairfax City's traffic, stormwater, and economic health. To manage these impacts, I will establish proactive, recurring communication channels with regional partners in Fairfax County and neighboring jurisdictions. When interests diverge, I will use collaborative diplomacy, pushing for joint impact studies and regional cost-sharing agreements to mitigate negative externalities on our residents.

Regarding our educational landscape, I support a comprehensive review of the City's partnership with Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS). While our schools provide exceptional education, a formal review ensures our specific municipal needs are met efficiently. On the City Council, I will advocate for transparent funding structures, equitable resource allocation for city-based students, and stronger institutional alignment on capital improvement projects. Furthermore, I will use this partnership review to push for expanded language access and specialized workforce training within our schools, ensuring that immigrant and minority students receive equal opportunities. By fostering deep institutional cooperation, we can maintain high-performing schools while remaining vigilant stewards of city tax dollars.

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?

RESPONSE (176 words):

When allocating limited funding to major infrastructure investments like the Willard-Sherwood Health & Community Center, the City Council must utilize a standardized, values-driven matrix. My professional work with the Health Department gives me unique expertise in assessing community welfare needs and neighborhood health access gaps. I will advocate for prioritizing projects based on three specific criteria: public accessibility, equity impact, and long-term community return.

First, projects must advance true inclusivity, meeting strict ADA compliance and expanding access for transit-dependent residents, seniors, and families. Second, we must prioritize investments that directly uplift historically underfunded neighborhoods and vulnerable populations, addressing structural inequities. Third, we must evaluate a project's long-term community value—ensuring it enhances public health, fosters social connectivity, and attracts sustainable economic activity, such as retaining local George Mason University graduates. My experience as a labor leader managing complex institutional negotiations has taught me that infrastructure must never be built in a vacuum. By using measurable, equity-focused criteria, we can ensure major public investments deliver maximum, long-lasting utility to every resident while remaining fiscally responsible and transparent.

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?

RESPONSE (169 words):

I strongly support the proposed Virginia Constitutional amendments regarding reproductive freedom, marriage equality, and restoring voting rights after felony incarceration. True

democracy requires protecting bodily autonomy, defending the dignity of all families, and dismantling systemic barriers to civic participation. Restoring voting rights is a critical component of racial and economic justice, ensuring formerly incarcerated individuals have an opportunity to contribute positively to their community.

As a Council member, my community-focused values will guide my policy decisions. I recognize that members of our community hold deeply rooted, differing viewpoints on these constitutional questions. Therefore, to lead effectively, I will prioritize open, transparent governance and structured civic dialogue. I will actively seek out feedback from residents who disagree with me, ensuring their concerns are genuinely heard and addressed without judgment. My entire career has been defined by building bridges across cultural, linguistic, and ideological divisions. I will serve as a visible, accessible advocate for all constituents, fostering mutual respect and ensuring City Hall remains an inclusive and representative space for everyone.

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?

RESPONSE (179 words):

Maintaining a civil, productive City Council is essential to achieving lasting, solutions-oriented progress for our city. When robust policy disagreements arise, I will take specific, actionable steps to ensure the debate remains focused on structural outcomes rather than personal friction.

First, I will actively model collaborative leadership by separating the person from the policy, seeking common ground on shared foundational goals—such as public safety and fiscal accountability—even when we disagree on the exact mechanics of execution. Second, I will advocate for structured pre-meeting policy workshops. These collaborative forums allow Council members to thoroughly analyze data, ask technical questions, and voice complex concerns in a constructive environment before entering the public voting chamber.

My decades of experience as a labor organizer and Director of the Fairfax Chapter of SEIU Virginia 512 have centered on bringing opposing parties to the negotiating table. By leading the effort that successfully united nearly 12,000 workers and navigating intense contract negotiations with County Executives, I have proven that I possess the professional discipline, empathy, and skills required to build consensus amid intense disagreement.

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?

RESPONSE (169 words):

My primary accountability belongs entirely to the residents of Fairfax City, not to political parties or corporate special interests. To ensure total transparency, I will host regular town halls

across the city, featuring real-time translation services to eliminate language barriers for our immigrant neighbors. I will publish a regular, public digital newsletter detailing my votes, policy justifications, and progress updates on campaign commitments. Residents can track my direct follow-through on key initiatives like the mobile-first Language Access Hub and the Worker Retention ordinance.

Furthermore, I will advocate for a centralized online city dashboard that tracks the status and expenditures of all council-approved capital projects. My record as an ethical leader is unblemished. During my decades of community advocacy and labor leadership, I have consistently fought against institutional inequities and championed transparency. I will bring that same uncompromising commitment to structural accountability to City Hall, maintaining a strict open-door policy so that every resident—regardless of their background or zip code—can directly engage with, question, and hold me accountable.

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

RESPONSE (190 words):

What I love most about Fairfax City is its beautiful, multicultural heart. Since making this city my home in 2002, I have been continuously inspired by the resilience of our working families, the entrepreneurial spirit of our small business owners, and the vibrant energy of the students studying right here in our community. We possess the unique charm of a close-knit, historic town combined with the dynamic potential of a diverse, forward-looking city.

As your City Council member, I will be a dedicated, solutions-oriented bridge builder who transforms grassroots energy into structural progress at City Hall. My platform tackles our most pressing challenges head-on: supporting our schools and teachers, expanding affordable housing, securing worker retention protections, ADA compliance across all public spaces, and implementing smart digital solutions like the Language Access Hub to ensure our government is fully accessible to all.

With a proven track record of bringing thousands of people together to achieve historic milestones, I have the experience and dedication to deliver equitable, practical results. I ask for your vote to help build a vibrant, prosperous, and inclusive Fairfax City where everyone has a seat at the table.

MARIA J FAIRMARX