

City of Fairfax 2026 Mayoral and Council Candidates Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Rachel McQuillen

Office Sought: City Council

Date Submitted: September 3

** * The Independent News Press does not have an Editorial Board and does not make any political endorsements in local, state or federal elections. This questionnaire is intended to be a discussion with candidates running for office and our readers. Based on readers feedback, our news coverage, and general welfare of the City of Fairfax, we have compiled the following questionnaire. We will not be able to respond to you for any clarification. Any response attacking another individual by name will be automatically deleted without any notice to you. Otherwise, we will not be editing any submission, including fact check and grammatical errors.*

Important Instructions:

- Opening statement under 300 words. Any submission over 300 words will get cut off in print in the October 2026 edition of The Fairfax Independent.
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- The **deadline for submission is September 14, 2026** emailed attachments in word and pdf formats to Publisher at info@theindependentnewspress.com.
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- Please sign the pdf copy of your response because it will be posted on our website. Responses to questions #2 to the closing statement will be posted on our website at <https://fairfaxindependentnews.press> by September 20, 2026.
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- The USPS will be distributing the October edition to City mailboxes by September 30, 2026. In the event that you did not receive your free circulation in the mail, please let us know or visit one of our pickup locations: Fairfax Giant, Fairfax Regional Library, Main Street Bagel, De Clieu Cafe, and the Oakton Community Library.
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- There will be one reminder to submit. If we don't receive your response, we respect your decision not to participate in discussion with our readers. We will make a note in the October edition that such candidates declined to participate in our questionnaire.
- **For those candidates wishing to participate, please respond with - "I intend to participate" by September 3 by emailing info@theindependentnewspress.com with your desired headshot.**
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Please answer questions #2 to #10 as specifically as possible in under 200 words. Links in responses are accepted to candidates' websites. We will not accept links to social media because it is fungible. Where appropriate, please identify specific actions, priorities, or measurable outcomes rather than general principles.

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)

I did not run for City Council to simply go along with every proposal placed in front of us. I ran to ask questions, challenge assumptions, and make decisions based on what I believe is best for the people who call Fairfax City home.

As a resident, mother, small-business owner, former School Board member, and now Council member, I see our city from many perspectives. I understand that Fairfax must evolve, but I also believe progress should be measured by more than how much we build or spend.

My approach is practical: protect taxpayers, support excellent schools and public safety, strengthen our local businesses, invest responsibly in infrastructure, and pursue redevelopment that adds lasting value without sacrificing the character and quality of life that make people choose Fairfax.

I am not afraid to vote no when the numbers, impacts, or community benefit do not make sense. I am equally willing to say yes to investments that move Fairfax forward.

I am seeking reelection because there is more work to do, and Fairfax deserves an independent voice willing to listen, dig into the details, and put our city first.

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?

I support redevelopment that makes Fairfax stronger, not simply denser. As a 6.3-square-mile city, we have to be thoughtful about how much growth we can realistically absorb and consider the cumulative impact of multiple projects, not evaluate each one in isolation.

I support projects that strengthen our commercial tax base, bring businesses and amenities residents want, expand appropriate housing choices, improve walkability, and create vibrant places while respecting surrounding neighborhoods. Our Small Area Plans are valuable guides, but every proposal still needs to make sense for its location and demonstrate that the benefits justify the impacts on traffic, infrastructure, schools, public safety, the environment, and taxpayers.

I would not support converting one of these sites to a data center. Our City has limited commercial land, and I believe there are better long-term uses for it. I also have significant concerns about data centers' enormous energy demands, necessary grid and utility infrastructure, environmental impacts, and questions that remain as this industry rapidly expands across Virginia.

Growth is inevitable. Our responsibility is to make sure it is thoughtful, sustainable, and ultimately makes Fairfax City a better place to live.

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.

When money is tight, we have to make choices. I believe we should take care of what we already have before spending money on new projects that are not urgent. I would be willing to delay some new amenities or lower-priority projects so we can first fund our schools, public safety, roads, basic services, and repairs to City buildings and facilities.

That does not mean those projects are not good ideas. It simply means we cannot do everything at once. Families have to make these choices with their own budgets, and the City should too.

I support letting voters decide on the proposed sales tax for school and public transportation projects. Our schools have major repair and renovation needs. If approved, this tax could provide another way to pay for those needs instead of relying so heavily on property taxes.

If voters approve the 1% sales tax, I believe every dollar should be clearly tracked and used only for the purposes voters approved.

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 offers a high level of service, and that is one of the reasons people choose to live here. But we also have to remember who is paying the bill.

I look at the City budget much like families look at their own. We have things we need, things we want, and sometimes good ideas that simply have to wait.

My record reflects that. I voted against raising the meals tax from 4% to 4.5%. I voted against advertising a higher possible property tax rate than the City Manager recommended. I also supported an outside review of City operations to look for savings and ways we can work better.

At the same time, I have supported strong schools, public safety, our City workforce, infrastructure, parks, and the services residents use every day.

We also need to grow our business tax base so homeowners are not asked to carry more of the burden.

I will continue asking the same questions I ask now: Do we need it? Can we afford it? Is there a better way? And does it provide real value to the people paying for it?

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.

Fairfax City does not exist in a bubble. What happens across our borders can affect our traffic, environment, schools, businesses, and quality of life. That is why relationships with our regional partners matter.

Like any relationship, there are benefits and challenges. Our partnership with FCPS is a great example. As a small city, we benefit from the resources, programs, specialized services, and purchasing power of one of the nation's largest school systems. That can provide opportunities and economies of scale we simply could not create on our own.

But good partnerships also require us to speak up when our needs differ. My responsibility on Council is to protect Fairfax City's interests while maintaining the relationships that serve us well.

I believe strongly in data-driven decisions. Oversight of the School Services Agreement is primarily the responsibility of our elected City School Board and Superintendent. If they determine a deeper review is needed, I would support them in doing that work and carefully consider what the data shows.

Regional cooperation should never mean giving up our voice. The best partnerships make room for both.

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?

Being a good steward of taxpayer money does not always mean saying yes or no. Sometimes it means asking enough questions to get to a better yes.

Willard-Sherwood is a good example. I initially could not support the project because I was concerned about the added yearly operating costs. After questions and discussions with Council, staff developed a cost-recovery plan using memberships, programs, rentals, and other fees to greatly reduce that burden. With that change, I was able to support the project, and it ultimately moved forward with the full Council's support.

For every major project, we also have to look beyond the price to build it. Grants can help pay for construction, but taxpayers may still be responsible for years of maintenance, staffing, utilities, stormwater needs, or other impacts.

I ask: Do we need it? Can we afford it now and later? Can partners, grants, or users help pay for it? And is it a good value for taxpayers?

Sometimes asking hard questions does not stop a good project. It makes the project better.

7. Virginia 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?

I support all three amendments.

I believe personal medical decisions belong with individuals, their families, and their doctors, not politicians. I believe two consenting adults should have the same freedom to marry and the same protection under the law.

I also support restoring voting rights after someone convicted of a felony has served their time and is released. Research has linked restoring voting rights and civic participation with lower rates of reoffending. If someone has served their time, I would rather help them successfully return to society than continue creating barriers that make that harder.

On City Council, my job is to serve everyone. When we discuss taxes, public safety, schools, development, or City services, your political party should not determine whether your voice matters.

I have served Fairfax City as an independent, and I take that seriously. I listen, ask questions, follow the facts, and work with people whose views may differ from mine.

My personal views may shape who I am, but they do not decide whose voice matters. I was elected to serve all of Fairfax City, and that is exactly what I will continue to do.

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?

I do not think a good Council is one where everyone agrees. Different ideas and hard questions often lead to better decisions.

I focus on the issue, not the person. I listen, ask questions, use facts, and explain my vote. When possible, I talk with colleagues directly instead of letting a disagreement become personal or public drama.

I have disagreed with every member of Council, and I have also worked with every member to get things done. That matters.

At the end of the day, none of us was elected to win arguments. We were elected to serve Fairfax City. We can disagree, vote differently, and still walk away from the dais ready to work together tomorrow.

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?

The best way to hold me accountable is to look at what I said I would do and then look at my record.

I ran on strong public schools, protecting our environment, public safety, affordability, and putting Fairfax City first. I have worked to keep those promises.

I strongly supported the \$220 million school bond approved by voters in 2024 and have continued supporting those school projects on Council. I also promised to pursue the 1% sales tax option to help fund school improvements and reduce our reliance on property taxes. This November, Fairfax voters will finally get to decide that question.

I also promised to protect our environment and take residents' concerns about the George Snyder Trail seriously. On Council, I pushed for another look at the project, walked the area, studied the environmental and safety concerns, questioned the long-term costs, and considered alternatives before voting.

Transparency means residents should know not only how I vote, but why.

I am an independent. My decisions belong to the people who elected me, not a political party or special interest. My record is public. Hold me to it.

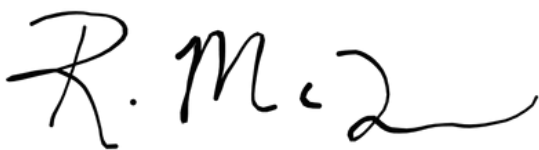
10. What do you love about the City and your final thoughts? (under 200 words)

Growing up in a military family, I moved a lot. I am grateful for that experience because it exposed me to different people, cultures, and ways of seeing the world. But it also made me appreciate just how special it is to find a community you truly want to stay in.

For my family, that is Fairfax City.

I have watched this community help raise my children, and somewhere along the way, I went from PTA mom and volunteer to School Board member and City Council member. That still means a great deal to me.

Serving has also made me fiercely protective of what makes our city special. Change will come, but we should be thoughtful about what we change and careful about what we lose. Fairfax City gave my family a home we chose. I am incredibly grateful for the chance to help care for it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Mc2" followed by a long, horizontal, wavy flourish.

