



**THE WNC GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB
2025 WOODFIN COMMISSION ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name:

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Office you are seeking:

Woodfin Town Council

Are you a dues-paying member of the Sierra Club or any other environmental organization?

I would like to join the Sierra Club. As a plumber and small business owner in the construction industry, I'm a current member of the Green Built Alliance, "an Asheville-based environmental non-profit organization that aims to transform the building industry in western North Carolina by supporting sustainable design, construction, and renewable energy."

1. Would you like your candidacy to be endorsed by the Sierra Club and why?

Yes, I would greatly appreciate an endorsement from the Sierra Club. Environmental issues have always been a part of my life. The conservation of our verdant spaces is important to me. Woodfin is my home. I was born and raised here. I've spent my entire life immersing myself in the natural beauty of Western North Carolina. Our family has a vested interest in the conservation and planning of Woodfin. We own thirty acres of forested land adjacent to the French Broad River and we want to keep it that way. With my background in construction and direct experience with both responsible and irresponsible development, I believe I am uniquely qualified in making the right choices for Woodfin's future.

2. Recently the Woodfin City Government has enacted a number of zoning and processes around development to address concerns that it favors developers over citizens concerns. If elected, do you support these changes and what additional changes do you think might be needed?

I support the revisions made by Woodfin Town Council and, as an elected official, I will continue to address residents' concerns. For decades, our town was a playground for excessive development resulting in irresponsible growth, extreme proposals such as the Bluffs, and ridiculous mountaintop Airbnbs. I am in favor of the current parameters and would like to examine a pathway to sustainable, long-lasting, well-built, affordable housing benefitting our economy.



How do we accomplish this? Let's establish development guidelines to address our housing shortage with both affordability and longterm sustainable planning. The key here is to attract buyers, especially first-time home buyers, to put down roots in Woodfin. The first step is to balance lot sizes and home sizes. Let's ensure new lots have enough room to allow for structural expansion while maintaining a healthy yard or green area on the property. The Altura project off Goodman Rd. is a prime example for revision. A modest home with a smaller footprint on a larger lot will be more affordable. It will reduce the total number of homes in a given area and ease overcrowding and traffic. And by constructing homes with future expansion in mind, homeowners can maintain their equity, expand their homes as their families grow, and put down roots as part of a vibrant economic community in Woodfin.

3. Development in the town must conform to its New Comprehensive Plan and its Steep Slope Zoning Ordinance. Do you feel the current new plans and Ordinances are now what Woodfin needs to manage growth and development? If not, what steps would you take to change them?

Yes, I believe the Woodfin Together and Steep Slope ordinance are important guidelines that were long overdue. My goal is to continue auditing their performance. What does a modern, sustainable Woodfin look like? I believe it begins with owning a home. What can we do as a community to encourage new owners, especially first-time home buyers? Let's build homes that cost less, can grow as families grow, and maintain a green space befitting of Woodfin's natural beauty.

4. How would you deal with the concerns of citizens about increased traffic congestion caused by new developments? How would you ensure that valid traffic studies and impacts are considered when approving new developments?

New development and its ensuing traffic issues are a major concern. Many of our roads are maintained by the Department of Transportation (DOT). Excessive development can cause traffic congestion, a greater number of accidents, and increased wear and tear to our infrastructure. Minimizing runoff debris by enacting better retention and erosion methods will reduce damage to our roads. Ongoing studies of our roadways is crucial. Proposals by developers must include up-to-date impact studies by independent third parties. By exploring zoning options, I believe a healthy balance between Woodfin and the DOT's responsibilities can be maintained.

5. Woodfin contains a lot of property along the French Broad River and has made a major investment of taxpayer dollars in Woodfin Greenway & Blueway project. Studies show that e-coli bacteria count in the French Broad make the river unsafe for swimming or tubing numerous days each summer.

- What can the town do to improve water quality?

Woodfin can improve water quality by tackling the largest cause of contamination: failed septic systems. Let's establish a more robust development services in Woodfin, including a liaison or ombudsman



between residents and Buncombe County Environmental Health. Our goal should be to provide residents with answers: on whom to call when issues arise; when, where, and how is testing conducted; and what resources and funding are available to repair failing septic systems, an often neglected issue. Let's establish an in-house approach -- a one-stop shop for Woodfin -- to address water quality, building inspections, plan review, and future development.

- Should the city minimize storm water runoff by requiring more retention or detention basins, rain gardens, or other methods to reduce surface water runoff and flooding for new developments?

Yes, without question. Retention and passive drainage are critical components of modern development. The burden of mitigating runoff should be placed on developers. Developers should plan for the first 1.5" inches of rainfall in any new construction. I would also like to see active soil retention in high risk areas, as well as on non-paved driveways. I support the application of systems like GeoGrid, an erosion mitigation tool.

This will also assist with the Department of Transportation (DOT) maintenance of Woodfin's roads by minimizing runoff debris. High risk areas may also need case-by-case scrutiny to ensure proper drainage and erosion control, including exploring financial retainage options to ensure things remain in working order for a minimum amount of time after the last house is sold and the developer no longer has a financial interest in the property.

6) Climate Change is already disrupting our weather with hotter weather and larger rain events.

- Would you support putting more Solar Panels on city buildings and/or putting solar farms on city owned or leased property?

Yes, I support solar panels and farms especially on government buildings and property. Additionally, in light of Hurricane Helene, let's establish a Woodfin Plan of Action (WPA) to incorporate portable solar and backup battery systems to provide power during those crucial gaps of outages.

- Would you support replacing fossil fuel powered city vehicles with electric powered vehicles as they need to be replaced?

I support a plan to replace petroleum-based vehicles with electric and hybrid vehicles moving forward. I would also love to see an implementation of biodiesel in all public work vehicles and ensure all new diesel equipment has a Diesel Exhaust Fluid (DEF) system which reduces greenhouse gases. Additionally, I would like to invest in battery powered outdoor equipment where applicable.



- Would you be willing to invest in making city owned buildings more energy efficient?

Yes, I am happy to invest in Woodfin's longterm future by updating our buildings to be more efficient. Our facilities need modernization, not just a simple cosmetic or functional face-lift. Efficient windows, vapor barriers, insulation, heat pump HVAC system, and high efficiency water heaters such as heat pump electric or condensing gas tankless unit are vital in reducing unnecessary energy consumption. Additionally, let's install light-colored metal roofing to reduce heat absorption and increase efficiency of indoor climate systems.

- What other measures would you propose to reduce our carbon footprint?

Reducing our carbon footprint begins with the Town of Woodfin itself. I will propose ongoing workshop sessions and small talks to keep our council and staff informed of current climate issues. We'll discuss ideas on how to address those issues, from a mindful approach of our personal actions to looking into bigger ideas such as protecting our tree canopies and replacing petroleum-based vehicles with electric and hybrid. An empowered staff can then share our knowledge with the public. These efforts can attract state, federal, and non-profit funding. If the world knows we are ready to change, they will help us make those changes.

7) Woodfin is regulating short term rentals (STRs) very strictly, only allowing new STR permits in Commercial/Industrial zoned areas and retroactively restricting permits to "one per entity", so no big corporations or their shells can keep STRs that they had multiples of. Is this enough, in your opinion?

Yes, I support our current short term rental (STR) regulations. I recognize the role of government, especially in the wake of Hurricane Helene, in supporting economic opportunities while maintaining the esteemed spirit of our town. An STR is a great way for a property owner to make extra money and support our local economy. But corporate ownership of STRs have dismantled entire neighborhoods across the country. We cannot allow that to happen here. Let's evaluate new STRs on a case-by-case basis to prevent oversaturation. Grandfathered STRs will require ongoing compliance. I am in favor of implementing an on-call response within one hour by the property owner or manager to mitigate issues with the STR.

8) What are the major environmental challenges facing the Town of Woodfin and what are your top priorities if elected?

My top priorities are addressing excessive development, modernizing our infrastructure, especially our archaic water system, and attracting new families to put down roots. In my area, which is largely rural, fire hydrants are rare to non-existent. Some parts of the system are almost a century old. As climate



change creates longer and drier conditions, will our fire departments and water system be able to address major fires quickly and safely? Improving our infrastructure will also improve our fire department safety ratings reducing our commercial insurance rates, saving money for our town and incentivizing economic investment.

9) Helene literally ripped the French Broad River and its environs apart, including dumping millions of tons of organic and man-made debris in Woodfin's part of the river. How do you think the clean-up was managed and do you think that enough has been done to repair the river and its banks?

I live next to the French Broad River and witnessed its destruction by Hurricane Helene. Our property had to deal with hundreds of tons of debris. As we recovered, I watched the debris removal process and its inefficiencies. The system is flawed by design by encouraging cubic yard versus set pricing for cleanup. Whatever fit in the truck was going in the truck because it paid better. It was a near crippling process to clean and restore our land. I've had conversations with Riverlink to explore federal funding for streambank and riverbank repair. Unfortunately those funds have yet to materialize. We must diligently monitor any available funds and aggressively pursue them. As an elected official, I pledge to seek local, state, and federal funds to ensure our river and lands are restored to its natural beauty.

After filling out this questionnaire please return it by email to: Ken Brame kenbrame@sbcglobal.net by August 4th. Interviews will follow.

Thank you for your interest in serving Woodfin.

Ken Brame

WNC Sierra Club Political Chair

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