

Candidates

From A1

The Hickory Daily Record reached out to the five candidates and asked three questions. Below are answers from the candidates.

Arnita Dula

What would be your focus as a member of Hickory City Council?

As a city council member, I will collaborate with my fellow council members to make sound decisions that best benefit Hickory's citizens. I believe citizens deserve safe neighborhoods, housing opportunities, good streets and strong economic development that provides good paying jobs and supports local small businesses.



Dula

How would you improve Ward 5?

I believe I can improve Ward 5 and the entire city by being a responsive communicator who not only talks to residents but who attentively listens to what they want.

Hickory is in the final stages of completing the Hickory Trail. What should the city invest in next to improve quality of life?

The city must continue looking to further enhance the trails by collaborating with other regional areas for greater trail connectivity and by promoting the development of amenities along the trails that improve the quality of all citizens' lives at every stage of life.

Kevin Gaylord

What would be your focus as a member of Hickory City Council?

Transparency, intentional growth and responsible budgeting. I want every resident to feel city government is accessible and accountable, while ensuring our investments strengthen neighborhoods, support local businesses, and secure Hickory's long-term financial health.



Gaylord

How would you improve Ward 5?

Ward 5 deserves safer streets and intersections for children, walkers, runners and bicyclists. My focus will be on road safety, infrastructure upgrades and revitalization that respects our neighborhoods while attracting new opportunities. Most importantly, I'll make sure Ward 5 has a strong and consistent voice at the table.

Hickory is in the final stages of completing the Hickory Trail. What should the city invest in next to improve quality of life?

Next, we should model intentional development around the new arts district and create stronger connections between it and the downtown square. This will build a cultural and economic hub that brings people together, supports local business and reinforces Hickory's identity as a vibrant, forward-looking city.

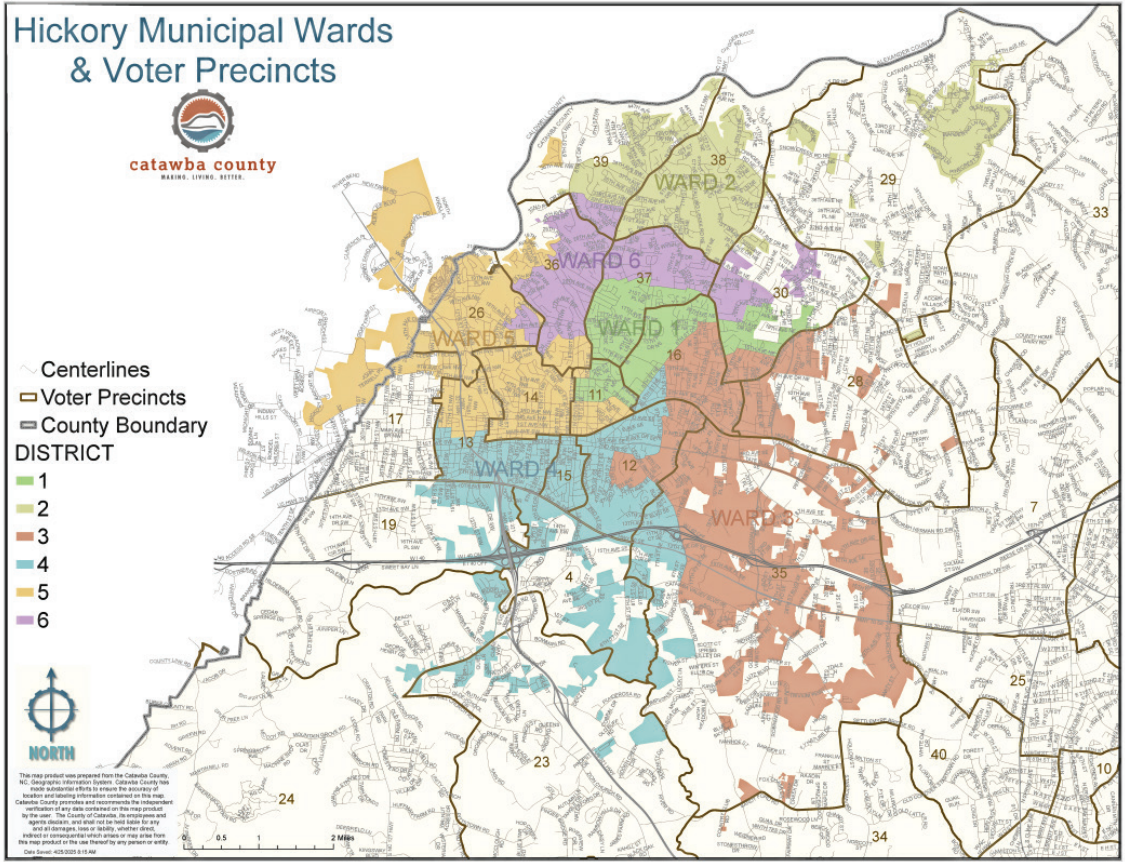
Joshua Ledford

What would be your focus as a member of Hickory City Council?

My focus as a member of Hickory City Council will be on economic development, infrastructure improvement and public safety. These are the core issues that most directly impact the daily lives and long-term well-being of our



Ledford



A map showing Hickory's wards.

residents. By prioritizing these areas, we can create a stronger, more resilient Hickory for everyone.

I will champion strategies to support local businesses, ensure our roads and public transportation are effective, and expand community policing programs to make our neighborhoods safer. I will also work to preserve the natural beauty of the area by supporting local conservation efforts.

How would you improve Ward 5?

To improve Ward 5 specifically, I'll focus on the key issues identified in the campaign plan: Downtown Revitalization: This involves increasing funding for renovations in Union Square and implementing strategies to attract new businesses and restaurants. This will not only make downtown more vibrant but also boost the local economy and create a new central gathering space for the community.

Public Safety: I will advocate for hiring more police officers and expanding community policing programs. The goal is to reduce crime rates and ensure all residents feel secure in their neighborhoods.

Traffic and Infrastructure: To address traffic congestion, my campaign will prioritize infrastructure improvement. This includes addressing road maintenance needs, improving traffic flow, and expanding public transportation options. I will focus on analyzing and optimizing traffic patterns and investing in infrastructure for public transit, pedestrians, and cyclists. Specifically, I will work to improve the U.S. Highway 321 and North Center Street intersection to ease traffic congestion and reduce commute times.

Hickory City Works Program: A solution that benefit our entire community and a way we can support our neighbors who are experiencing tough times — such as homelessness, living in their car or couch surfing — and provide them with an opportunity to get back on their feet. This program would offer individuals a safe, temporary (up to 6 months) place to stay in exchange for valuable community service. By contributing approximately 20 hours a week to projects like park cleanups or downtown maintenance, participants would have stable housing while having the time to work a part-time job and save money toward more permanent housing. It would save our city money, get important projects done, and give people an opportunity to start over without getting caught up in the system.

Hickory is in the final stages of completing the Hickory Trail. What should the city invest in next to improve quality of life?

With the Hickory Trail nearing completion, the city's next logical investment to improve the quality of life should be in local business and workforce development. The trail is a major quality-of-life and economic catalyst, but we need to ensure the trail's success translates into

tangible benefits for the entire community.

Supporting Small Businesses: The city should focus on initiatives that offer incentives for new businesses to open in Hickory, and also reduce regulations for small business owners.

Workforce Development: We must invest in programs that provide job training and skill development for our residents. This ensures that as new industries are attracted to Hickory, we have a qualified, local workforce ready to fill those jobs.

Solar Energy Parking Coverings: An innovative and collaborative solution that improves our community without burdening taxpayers to initiate partnerships between local businesses and utility companies to install solar panels in their parking lots, a model inspired by successful projects like the one at Sierra Nevada in Asheville to offers a win-win for everyone in Hickory.

For Residents: On hot summer days, this initiative would provide much-needed shade in parking lots, making trips to local businesses and government centers more comfortable.

For Businesses: Companies would see a significant reduction in their energy costs.

For Our Environment: By reducing our dependency on the traditional power grid, this plan can help Duke Energy meet its green energy initiatives and protect our natural resources.

Taylor Newton

What would be your focus as a member of Hickory City Council?

In times of change, strong communities matter. National shifts in the economy, politics, and public trust are hitting close to home. In response, we must build resilience locally.

If elected, I will focus on three priorities: 1) promoting creative solutions for safe, affordable housing, 2) expanding economic opportunity for residents and small businesses, and 3) empowering the people of Hickory to understand how decisions are made in local government and to be more civically and civilly engaged.

It's easy for folks to overpromise while campaigning, but these priorities are not abstract hopes. You can read more about the specifics at [NewtonforHickory.com](#).

I have never been employed by the city of Hickory. Some may see that as a lack of experience, but I see it as a strength. I bring fresh perspectives and a proven record of service and leadership. I bring 15 years as an educator focused on community engagement and bridging divides. And I bring the lived experience of being a parent raising my family here. Together, these experiences drive my commitment to building strong and resilient communities.

How would you improve Ward 5?

According to a recent Pew Re-

search Center poll, confidence in public institutions like government, media, science and education is historically low and only 34% of Americans say that most people can be trusted. While this problem is bigger than any one local election, it points to a deeper need. People feel disconnected and divided. Community is harder to come by than it once was.

As a politically independent candidate, I am committed to local priorities instead of partisan divides. I believe that coming together with a focus on our local issues is how the people of Ward 5 and the city of Hickory can find the way back to seeing one another as neighbors, not opponents. Together, we can rebuild trust, strengthen community and shape a resilient Hickory where we can all thrive.

Hickory is in the final stages of completing the Hickory Trail. What should the city invest in next to improve quality of life?

Our city needs more affordable housing. According to a presentation given to Hickory City Council this month by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments, the median sales price of a home in our area rose from \$125,000 in 2014 to \$299,000 today. Only 26% of households living here can afford a typically priced home. Rent costs have also ballooned, leaving too many stretched thin.

City staff and community partners are working hard to address this challenge, but the scale of the problem demands even more creativity and collaboration. If we don't take bold action, the housing affordability gap will not only continue to affect current residents but also our city's long-term growth and economic stability.

If you're fortunate to live in housing you can afford, it can be easy to think this issue doesn't touch you — but it does. Teachers should be able to live near the schools where they teach. Police officers should be able to live in the neighborhoods they serve. Employers do better when workers are stable and supported. And young people who want to build their future here in Hickory should be able to find housing they can afford, instead of being priced right out of town. That's why I care so deeply about safe, affordable housing. The strength of our community and the resilience of Hickory depend on it.

David Zagaroli (incumbent)

What would be your focus as a member of Hickory City Council?

My focus as a city council member is promoting economic development and recruiting well-paying jobs to the community to benefit our citizens. Over the past five years alone 1,700 new jobs have been announced in Hickory through



Zagaroli

Municipal candidate forums

Below is a list of candidate forums being held in Catawba County.

Hickory

Sept. 15

Hickory NAACP forum for Ward 5 candidates

St. Luke's United Methodist Church, 52 16th Ave. NW, Hickory

6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Oct. 14

Hickory candidate forum

Patrick Beaver Library, 375 Third St. NE, Hickory

6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Newton

Oct. 11

Newton candidate forum

Catawba County Library, 115 W. C St., Newton

10 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.

Conover

Oct. 9

Meet the candidates

N.C. Works Career Center, 403 Conover Station SE, Conover

5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Maiden

Oct. 6

Meet the candidates

Maiden Recreation Center, 207 E. Klutz St., Maiden

5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

efforts of the city and its economic development partners. It is important that we continue to focus on initiatives that highlight our resources and amenities.

One of our most important natural resources is the Catawba River. It is essential to protect it as a resilient water treatment and distribution system for our citizens. The city is investing millions of dollars to protect this resource and I am excited to be a part of that.

How would you improve Ward 5?

During my time on council, the city has invested over \$123 million in the Hickory Trail systems that benefits all four quadrants of the city. We are actively working on expanding the Hickory Trail System in Ward 5 which includes construction of the OLLE Art Walk along Old Le noir Road and connections to the Aviation Walk from ASU-Hickory as well as the Hickory Aviation Museum.

I support the continued development of the Hickory Innovation District located around ASU-Hickory, the Hickory Regional Airport, improvements to Rotary-Geitner Park and Glenn Hilton Park all of which are located in Ward 5.

Hickory City Council members work for all citizens of Hickory regardless of the ward they are located in. I will continue to make decisions based on the best interest of all Hickory citizens and businesses.

Hickory is in the final stages of completing the Hickory Trail. What should the city invest in next to improve quality of life?

Moving forward we should focus on improving connectivity throughout the city as we continue to elevate the life amenities our citizens enjoy through parks, recreational facilities, libraries, enhanced trail system, transportation projects and downtown vitality. My goal is to continue to improve the quality of life that meets the diverse needs of all who live here.

Billy Chapman is a reporter with the Hickory Daily Record. wchapman@hickoryrecord.com