



ARTS & CULTURE QUESTIONNAIRE

2021 DALLAS CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES

Thank you being a candidate and for your willingness to serve! And thank you in advance for answering the DACAC Arts & Culture Questionnaire for candidates for Dallas City Council in the upcoming 2021 election. You can fill this out online at [this LINK](#). The responses can go below and the form saved as a pdf and emailed to dacac@artsdallas.org.

1. NAME: Gay Donnell Willis

2. COUNCIL DISTRICT: 13

3. YOU AND THE ARTS

Give us a sense about your relationship with the arts

My family and I enjoy many facets of the arts and look forward to being able to safely return to seeing performances. We attend the Dallas Summer Musicals and most recently attended the DSO Concert Truck visit to Turtle Creek Park. My husband and I attend lectures by Neil DeGrasse Tyson and musicals at AT&T PAC. And my children will tell you I've never met a museum I didn't like. I was particularly impressed on a Junior League Sustainer outing to see Swan Lake by the Texas Ballet Theatre a few years ago. I've gotten exposure to the Cara Mia Theatre through performances intended to deepen the learning at the Truth Racial Healing & Transformation work sessions and meetings, and would like to see more.

I grew up in Ft. Worth where the arts community is strong—so going to performances at Casa Manana and the Scott Theatre, or visiting the Kimbell Art Museum were a childhood norm. I would love for that to be the case for the school children of Dallas.

4. ADVOCACY

The support of our elected City leaders is important to ensuring arts and culture remain a priority at City Hall and part of the civic dialogue.

QUESTION: How have you advocated for the arts community and/or how will you do that going forward? It's important to grasp the economic impact of the arts on our city—from the number of people it employs to the tourist draw it creates. So

if one doesn't feel particularly engaged from an artistic perspective, I would be sure that they understand the overall benefit of having a robust arts community.

5. SUPPORT & RECOVERY

Prior to COVID, the Dallas creative economy was on track to have an economic impact surpassing \$1B a year, a vital business sector. The pandemic derailed that momentum. Arts facilities were the first to close and will be among the last to reopen at full capacity. The city's nonprofit arts and cultural community has lost more than \$95M and over 1,000 jobs and cultural tourism has virtually stopped. City support has been critical to keeping these institutions alive. Even in a tough budget year, this need remains.

QUESTION: Will you work to see that City support continues and how will you ensure arts and culture play a key role in the Dallas economic recovery?

Creating a budget requires analysis of each line item. Having a councilperson that understands, as I do, the economic impact of the arts should be a differentiator amongst art patrons. There are many needs in our city that need funding, and we also must factor in the impact of COVID on our tax receipts, so it's likely that hard decisions will need to be made. The fact that part of the HOT (hotel occupancy tax) tax we collect can be used to fund arts venue maintenance, and that the arts are a tourism draw, elevates the importance even further.

6. EQUITY AND NEIGHBORHOODS

The top pillar of the Dallas Cultural Plan is Equity, with a goal of ensuring arts and culture are accessible in communities that have been historically underserved. And we know when arts are purposefully imbedded in the community, they can fight urban blight and create vibrant neighborhoods.

QUESTION: How will you keep the focus on equitable access to the arts; and specifically where and how would you like to see art used to address challenges in your City Council District.

One way to keep focus on the arts in an equitable way is to bring art to the people. I am a proponent of linking existing resources to minimize cost and maximize exposure—so I like arts, libraries and parks to work together for programming and venue. This is something I've demonstrated as President & CEO at Turtle Creek Park, where we have welcomed the DSO Concert Truck in beautiful, natural greenspace, along with local food trucks and natural stone jewelry craftspeople to draw people in with one arts hook, but expose them to several.

On the eastern and western sides of the district, using the Vickery Park and Park Forest Libraries, as well as parks in the districts, as forums to bring people together for exhibits or performances, is how I would bring access. These amenities are in use anyway and don't present an obstacle for attending an arts event. Plus, there are many nonprofits (not just local) who will fund this type of arts outreach.

7. PARTICIPATION

The Dallas arts and cultural community is diverse and growing and contains a range of genres, ethnicities, locations and more. Every group, especially those serving your district, is honored when elected officials attend a program, visit our organizations, or even stop by a monthly DACAC meeting to say hello.

QUESTION: Will you commit to attending local programs (performances, exhibitions, classes) or meeting with a Dallas arts organization on a regular basis? What would that look like? I already attend arts performances, lectures and exhibits because I enjoy them, so this is not a difficult request to fulfill. I would welcome the opportunity to get to know more arts organizations than I currently do.

While DACAC does not endorse candidates, these responses do guide consideration for support by individuals such as arts patrons and advocates, artists, board members, and more. Your responses will be publicly shared on our website to review. www.DallasNeedstheArts.com.