City of Asheville

BOARDS & COMMISSIONS

Application Form

Applicants are strongly urged to attend several meetings of a board prior to applying

Name of board or commission: Asheville Board of Education

Your name: Peyton O'Conner Home Phone #: 8287132083

Street address: 71 West Street City: Asheville Zip Code: 28801

Mailing address (if different): _____

Employer: Buncombe County Recreation Services

Your position: Director Office Phone #: 8282506703

Resident of City Asheville County Buncombe Race W * Gender Identity: non-binary *

Are you a Homeowner or a Renter? * Homeowner Age: 38

Residence location (check one): Central ✔ North _____ South _____ East _____ West _____

Are you aware of any potential conflicts of interest that may arise during your service on this board (i.e., property interest, business interest, etc.)? If so, please explain: None to my knowledge _____. Potential conflicts of interest do not preclude appointments.

Please indicate the area(s) of expertise that you can bring to the above board(s), and then in detail list education, experience, reasons for your interest, and other factors that support your interest in serving **Applicants are encouraged to provide a cover letter and/or a brief resume. Please use additional sheets if necessary.**

I am well-versed in the facets of nonprofit and local government operations and governance. I have a long background of public service and service to a variety of boards and commissions in Asheville and Buncombe County.

This particular board is of interest to me as a parent of children about to enter Asheville's education system and as a long-term resident of Asheville. I am excited to be able to offer my skills in service to the community and am very interested in contributing to efforts that advance education.

As I have begun to work to integrate diversity and equity into my professional efforts, I would like to contribute to advancements in that arena throughout our community, particularly as it pertains to providing children access and success in setting the educational foundation that will impact the rest of their life.

I feel like my experience as a parent and my own unique path to obtaining an education in this area will provide helpful insight to the board.

Return to:

City Clerk's Office
PO Box 7148
Asheville, NC 28802-7148

Email: boards@ashevillenc.gov
Telephone: 259-5839
Fax #: 259-5499

Signature: _____

Date: 1-Feb-2021

E-Mail: peyton.z.oconner@gmail.com

Fax #: _____

* This information is requested for the sole purpose of assuring that a cross section of the community is appointed.

Peyton O'Conner

they/them/Mx.
peyton.z.oconner@gmail.com
71 West St. Asheville, NC
828-713-2083

The City of Asheville
70 Court Plaza
P.O. Box 7148
Asheville, NC 28802

Dear Mayor and Members of City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to apply for a position on the Asheville City School Board. As a parent to five children (two of who are school age, the other two will be entering an Asheville City School in the fall), primary education is something that holds particular value in our household.

As someone who has been able to leverage the educational offerings within the Asheville area to create a better life for myself and my family, I am a firm believer in the power of education and an advocate for removing barriers that prevent access to high-quality educational offerings. I also understand the need for academic systems that are robust and that offer a variety of opportunities for student success. I entered our local community college system as a GED recipient and have come to understand the value of education systems that work to advance students regardless how they enter the system.

Throughout my academic career, I have maintained focus on education, community engagement, conflict resolution, and governance. I am excited about the unique challenges that a position on the school board could offer and I am excited about being able to apply myself to an area of our City's governing structure in which the future of my children is so invested. I am also interested in contributing to efforts to reduce systematic inequalities across our educational system

In addition to my academic background, I believe my work in the field of recreation has highlighted some complementary areas relative to education and one of the major initiatives we have engaged as a department is how to advance the work of recreation to elevate our facilities to become educational facilities as well as an prominent example as diversity and inclusion.

Thank you for the work that you do and thank you for consideration of my application.

Peyton O'Conner, AICP, CPRE, CNP

Peyton O'Conner

they/them/Mx.
peyton.z.oconner@gmail.com
71 West St. Asheville, NC
828-713-2083

Experience

Director Aug 2007 to Feb 2015
Buncombe County Recreation Services Asheville, NC

- Provide managerial oversight related to parks facilities, departmental budget, daily operations, and personnel issues.
- Coordinate long-term planning and financial analysis for implementation of parks and greenways masterplans.
- Oversee communications and marketing strategies including public input and involvement.
- Integrate recreation into other County strategic objectives including transportation initiatives and public health programs.

Zoning Administrator/Planner III Aug 2007 to Feb 2015
Buncombe County Planning Asheville, NC

- Oversaw zoning enforcement and land use policy development.
- Worked with citizens and elected officials to understand opportunities to improve development.
- Conducted board meetings and ensures that administrative process meet all state requirements.
- Provided research and direction for long-range planning efforts including the Buncombe County Sustainability Plan and Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update.

Freelance Consultation and Writing Oct 2009 to Present
LocalPlan Asheville, NC

- Provide critiques for pre-press manuscripts and articles.
- Draft press releases and other time sensitive articles for release.
- Provided editorial oversight of built environment related articles for international audience.
- Coordinated social media outreach and international dialogues using virtual platforms.
- Recruited and trained new authors in web publishing and virtual social engagement.

Operations NCO/Platoon Sergeant Feb 2003 to Feb 2012
United States Army Multiple Locations

Combat Engineer/Construction Engineer Supervisor

- Oversaw combat operations of a forward-deployed horizontal construction element in southern Iraq.
- Served as Environmental Compliance Officer, Information Assurance Officer, Safety Officer, and Linguist Manager.
- Managed daily operations of a headquarters platoon which included operations, communications, intelligence, logistics, and medical personnel as well as civilian linguist and contractors.
- Supervised company training and recertification programs through all phases of deployment.

1.
2.

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3. Current Projects and Endeavors

4.

- 2020 – NC Recreation and Parks Association Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Cohort
- 2020 – Buncombe County Ambulance Driver Training
- Pending (February 2021) – NC School of Government, Leading for Results
- Pending (February 2021) – Certificate in Effective Change Management, Western Carolina University
- Pending (March 2021) – Certificate in Diversity and Inclusion, Cornell University

5. Skills

6.

- Training and education content development
- Training and education management
- Managerial oversight and personnel administration
- Project management, evaluation, prioritization, and selection
- Land use management and long-term planning
- Spatial modeling and GIS
- Board management and group decision-making
- Stakeholder mapping and analysis
- Urban agriculture analysis and marketing

7.

- Sustainability planning
- Transportation planning
- Meeting facilitation and conflict resolution
- Editorial oversight and content publishing
- Social media marketing and use of virtual engagement platforms
- Regulatory compliance
- Communications and public relations
- Operations and logistics management
- Community organizing and grassroots campaigns

8. Education

- 2015 – MA, Conflict and Peace Studies, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- 2013 - Masters of Project Management, Western Carolina University
- 2009 – MA, Geography, Appalachian State University
- 2012 – BA, Sociology (Summa Cum Laude), American Military University
- 2007 – BS, Environmental Studies, University of North Carolina at Asheville
- 2012 – AAS, Geospatial Technology (with Honors), Haywood Community College
- 2010 – AA, Communication (with Honors) , American Military University
- 2001 – AAS, Information Systems (with Honors) , Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
- 2018 – High Impact Leadership Certificate, Western Carolina University
- 2016 – Event Planning Certificate, Western Carolina University
- 2014 - Certificate in Agriculture Business Management, North Carolina State University
- 2012 – Project Management Certificate, Western Carolina University
- 2012 – Certificate, Global Positioning Systems Specialist, Haywood Community College
- 2012 – Certificate, Property Mapping Specialist, Haywood Community College
- 2009 – Certificate in Advanced Geospatial Technology, Haywood Community College
- 2009 – Certificate in Geospatial Technology, Haywood Community College
- 2008 - Certificate in GIS, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
- Pending – Masters of Sustainable Food Systems, Green Mountain College

9. Certifications

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- American Institute of Certified Planners
- Certified Zoning Official
- Low Impact Development Certified
- Congress for New Urbanism – Accredited
- Certified Floodplain Manager
- Certified Youth Sports Administrator
- Certified Nonprofit Professional
- Certified Parks and Recreation Executive
- NCI Charrette System Certificate Holder and ToP Facilitation Methods Certificate Holder
- NC Certified Bee Keeper
- Better Process Control School Acidified Food Certified
- Advanced Certified Coach – Special Olympics NC

10. Awards and Recognition

- Combat Action Badge
- Army Commendation Medal
- Army Good Conduct Medal
- Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal
- Boy Scouts of America Eagle Scout Award
- Academic Honors: Order of Omega, Golden Key, Pi Gamma Mu, Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Theta Kappa, Beta Gamma Sigma

12. Organizations and Civic Participation

13.

- French Broad Food Co-Op Board of Directors (2016 – Present)
- Stonewall Sports Asheville Board of Directors (2019 - Present)
- Buncombe County Local Co-Coordinator, Special Olympics North Carolina (2015-Present)
- French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization Technical Coordinating Committee, Chair (2015-2020)
- French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization Technical Coordinating Committee, Vice Chair (2011-2015)
- Asheville Parks and Greenways Foundation, Vice President (2013-2015)
- Sustainability Advisory Council for Energy and Environment (2013-2019)
- Oakley Farmers Market, Board of Directors Member (2012-2018)
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Vice Chair (2011-2015)
- Asheville Design Center, Volunteer (2009-10, 2011-2013)
- ToxicFree NC, Volunteer (2013 – 2014)
- Mayor's Committee for Veterans Affairs, Chair (2009-10, 2011-2012), Vice Chair (2007-2009)
- Transit Commission Member (2008-2010)
- Transit Commission Master Plan Steering Committee Member (2007)
- Watershed Policy Committee Member (2007-2009)
- Oakley Community Association President (2009-2014)
- Coalition of Asheville Neighborhoods Representative (2009-2014)
- University of North Carolina at Asheville, Student Government, Vice President (2002-2005)
- Sigma Nu Fraternity Mu Eta Chapter, Vice President (2003-2005)

Peyton O'Conner
Board of Education Essay Questions
March 2, 2021

1. **Please describe specific experience you have had at a board of director's level and in oversight of a CEO, executive director, or organizational head. In doing so, please describe your views as to the roles and duties of board members versus senior staff.**

   Completing the Certified Nonprofit Professional (CNP) credentialing process has been extremely impactful in allowing me to understand the structure of organizational operations, especially as it pertains to the roles and responsibilities within the executive director/board relationship. In addition, I offer my previous organizational experience as specific evidence:

   - French Broad Food Co-Op Board of Directors
   - Stonewall Sports Asheville Board of Directors
   - Buncombe County Local Co-Coordinator, Special Olympics North Carolina
   - Chair, French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization TCC
   - Sustainability Advisory Council for Energy and Environment
   - Oakley Farmers Market, Board of Directors
   - Chair, Mayor's Committee for Veterans Affairs
   - Transit Commission Member
   - City of Asheville Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Member

   In addition to these roles, I have also served as senior staff to the Buncombe County Board of Adjustment, the Buncombe County Planning Board, the Buncombe County Sustainability Planning Steering Committee, and the Buncombe County Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Advisory Board.

   Board members are there to set the direction and provide a sounding board based on their experience, coalesce a wide range of views from the community members who comprise their constituents, and provide an appropriate venue to listen to and direct staff regarding the input received from the public at large on issues confronting the system.

   Senior staff engage in day-to-day operations and execution of the Board's direction which comes in the form of their engagement of matters of governance, long-range planning and visioning, approval of budgets, and approval of substantial financial obligations. These should include oversight of major investments or projects the organization might undertake, such as purchase of buildings or equipment and the approval of long-term contracts.

Peyton O'Conner
Board of Education Essay Questions
March 2, 2021

2. **In what ways can Asheville City Schools effectively innovate?**

Effective innovation requires frameworks and parameters that clearly define and articulate school system goals while focusing on a community-supported pathway to success. ACS should develop such a framework for innovation through its strategic plan. The current strategic plan went through 2020; this is an excellent opportunity to create a path forward with input from the community. Innovation is effective when it exists within an environment that supports it through dedicated organizational resources (i.e. personnel and capital). A strategic plan creates a pathway for innovation by documenting an end state vision and providing the support necessary to achieve it.

The achievement gap is an excellent site for innovation because it is not as solely an educational issue, it's a community issue. It's an issue driven by systemic inequities that have long divided our city along racial lines and along socioeconomic lines. It is a systems level issue that relates to the opportunities and resources that those who are struggling the most within our community are deprived of.

Closing the achievement gap requires community partnerships to provide students with access to the foundation that they need for a quality education. To move up on Maslow's hierarchy, students must first have support for their most critical needs at the base of the pyramid. This means viewing schools as a connection point for access to critical services which can stabilize their lives and allow them to focus on learning rather than focusing on survival and safe environments. Among these are alleviation of food insecurity, access to medical and mental health services, homelessness engagement and outreach, connection to transportation resources, and linkages to economic assistance programs for families. We have to meet the students where they are at and ensure that they are prepared to fully engage at school rather than expecting students to succeed without the basic resources that all youth deserve.

Peyton O'Conner
Board of Education Essay Questions
March 2, 2021

3. **What is your capacity for understanding and guiding on financial oversight, real estate assets, facility maintenance, and long range planning?**

I currently manage a portfolio of projects collectively valued at $21m relative to active engineering, land acquisition, and construction efforts as well as a host of other smaller projects that are managed on an opportunity basis as grant funding or cost savings allow. As part of these projects, I am responsible for directly overseeing grant reporting, financial budgeting, and capital improvement forecasting.

I oversee the facility maintenance in conjunction with Buncombe County's General Services Department at five swimming pools, seven river parks, six recreation parks, and one nature preserve.

In terms of long range planning, I have been involved in Buncombe County's plan creation process for its 2009 and 2012 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Updates as well as the 2012 Sustainability Plan. I have participated on numerous steering committees for land use and corridor plans involving maximization of real estate throughout Asheville and Buncombe County through the French Broad River MPO. I have overseen numerous greenway feasibility studies which examine long range greenway development plans along with real estate acquisition and right-of-way forecasts.

In Iraq I managed the buildings and facilities for a horizontal engineering unit and assisted with issues of facility maintenance and logistics that involved maintaining continuity of operations while working to reduce our footprint in advance of the withdrawal of forces.

I have also served on a number of boards that require financial oversight of an organization including the French Broad Food Co-op, Stonewall Sports (where I serve as treasurer for the local chapter), and Buncombe County Special Olympics (where I have previously been responsible for budgeting and fundraising for the entire programmatic budget in conjunction with my team).

Peyton O'Conner
Board of Education Essay Questions
March 2, 2021

4. **Many school districts face continuity of leadership, especially at the level of superintendency. What would you do to promote continuity of leadership? And what do you see as your role working with the superintendent to build a strong partnership?**

The school board is ultimately responsible for building the relationship between themselves and the superintendent and crafting the vision for how they see the superintendency achieving the aims contained within their long-range plans. Thus, I believe that continuity of leadership can be promoted through clearly articulating expectations, performance monitoring, and providing real-time feedback on iterative progress.

The approach I have seen utilized (and the approach I prefer) is to allow the Superintendent to develop a workplan that lays out their yearly approach to tackling the strategic plan goals and objectives. This plan would be reviewed and approved (with public scrutiny) by the Board of Education to create an atmosphere of accountability and transparency. The Superintendent would then be evaluated according to their quantitative achievements according to that work plan and the qualitative descriptions of how they made progress toward those achievements.

Outside of the strategic plan framework, qualitative factors should focus on some of the following areas:

- Cultural climate within the Asheville City Schools (including 360 feedback from current system faculty and employees).
- Parental attitudes toward school system experience.
- Overall image of the Asheville City Schools "brand" within the public at large.
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts

Quantitative factors should include some of the following metrics:

- Organizational balance of teachers and administrators
- Cost of education per pupil
- Capital project budget and schedule delivery performance
- Graduation rate
- Dropout rate

Creating a framework for success requires setting clear goals for the superintendency that are formed around accessible opportunities for public engagement and input.

Through this framework superintendents can better achieve transparency and accountability in a fashion that allows for evolution of the school system while ensuring continuity by providing clear expectations and goals. While there will always be turnover in any organization, creating such clear plans and frameworks will create a system that can transition seamlessly between leadership rather than having to start from the ground up with each transition.

Peyton O'Conner
Board of Education Essay Questions
March 2, 2021

5. **In your opinion, as a school board member, what is your role in representing our community when making a decision that would be unpopular with a large number of your constituents?**

Ultimately, I view the role of a school board member as looking to the viability, long-term advancement, and financial solvency of the school system. It is also about looking to both the present and future success of students.

I think it's extremely important to heavily balance long-term stability, evolution, and growth against short-term gains in public decision-making. Having spent most of my career working in public service, I know that not every decision will be popular. I will also note that making the necessary reforms related to social and racial justice will require transformational changes in favor of marginalized and minority groups that may inconvenience the predominant majority paradigm.

My role is to listen, reflect, and communicate regarding the inputs that go into decision-making and create opportunities for transparency and accountability. The role of the board is to make those constituents feel heard, make it clear that their input was considered, and then convey the rationale that went into their decision publicly. In those unpopular decisions, my goal would be to ensure that public input had been appropriately considered and coalesced into the end decision.

It's important to engage constituents with realistic expectations from the beginning. Processes are often too open-ended to allow citizens to fully understand the parameters in which a decision is being made, leading to disappointment with the outcomes. In presenting and framing decisions within the available options and asking for direct feedback on those options, there are opportunities to reduce friction between the board and constituents. Including constituents in the foundational work that may later constrain decision-making, thus frustrating constituents who feel like they are not being listened to. By ensuring that constituents are engaged at every step of the way and stressing to them the importance of foundation work (i.e. the strategic plan), they can join the board in setting the stage with efforts that will enable and drive future decisions.