City of Asheville
City Council Vacancy Application Form

Your name: Richard G. Lee III Home Phone #: (828) 460-2624

Street Address: 520 New Haw Creek Rd City: Asheville Zip Code: 28805

Mailing Address (if different): _____

Employer: Edward Jones

Position: Financial Advisor Office Phone # (828) 236-3220

Resident of City of Asheville (required): ● Yes ☐ No

Registered Voter in the City of Asheville (required): ● Yes ☐ No

Race: White Sex: Male Age: 40

Residence location (check one) Central ____ North ____ South ____ East ● West ____

Additional Information Required:

1. Resume
2. ½ page response to the essay questions below: (not attached)

Richard G Lee

Applicant Signature
Date: 08/20/2020

All applications and attachments must be
Returned by **Noon, Thursday, August 20**, 2020 to:

Maggie Burleson, City Clerk
PO Box 7148
Asheville, NC 28802
Email: mburleson@ashevillenc.gov
Phone: 828-259-5601

Rich Lee

520 New Haw Creek Rd. Asheville, NC 28806
richleeforasheville@gmail.com – (828) 460-2624

Education

2004	M.A. English Western Carolina University
2002	B.A. English/Spanish Western Carolina University

Professional & Development Experience

2011 – present	Financial Advisor Edward Jones & Co – Asheville, NC
2004 – 2005	Special Education Volunteer U.S. Peace Corps – Karak, Jordan
2003 – 2004	Adult High School Instructor Southwestern Community College/Lyndon B. Johnson JobCorps – Franklin, NC

Volunteer & Board Experience

- Chair, Asheville Multimodal Transportation Commission
- Vice-chair, Asheville Greenway Committee
- Member, Vision Zero Task Force
- Treasurer, Green Opportunities
- Co-president, Coalition of Asheville Neighborhoods
- Chair, Bountiful Cities Project
- Member, I-26 ConnectUs Project
- Chair, WNC Senior Resource Network
- Chair, Buncombe County TRIAD
- Alternate Delegate, Land of Sky Regional Council Board
- Vice-chair WNC Group Homes for Autism Board
- Member, New Belgium Community Leaders Roundtable
- Member, JustEconomics Policy Advisory Committee
- Member, Asheville Chamber Government Affairs Committee
- Member, East West Asheville Neighborhood Association Board
- Member, OUR Voice Latino Outreach Committee
- Vice-chair, Land of Sky Senior Volunteer Services Advisory Committee
- Member, WCU College of Arts and Sciences Student Advisory Board

The following questions may be answered directly on this form, or responses uploaded as attachments upon form submission.

1. With the death of George Floyd the country was thrust into a new civil rights movement. Policing in America was scrutinized even more and even here locally reparations were passed. Please explain if you believe that systemic racism and oppression exist, if yes do you or do you not support reparations and what it all means in the context of equity and Inclusion.

Yes, systemic racism exists. That shouldn't be a difficult or controversial thing to say. When police stop black drivers locally at three times the rate of white drivers – even though they're less likely to be engaged in a crime – that's systemic racism. When black students in local schools are given harsher punishments, even criminal punishments, for the same behavior as white students, or when they're "tracked" out of AG and AP college-prep classes, that's systemic racism. When transportation and city planning decisions consign mostly-Black neighborhoods to disinvestment and demolition, that's systemic racism. I don't mean decision-makers in those cases are consciously or overtly racist. They're probably not. The "systemic" part of systemic racism is how racially-disparate outcomes are baked into seemingly neutral policies, how "just carrying out the law" or "just following best practices" can still create disparities, even when that's not your intention – even if you intend the opposite. Over generations, those disparities grow and reinforce themselves: a Black neighborhood is marked for urban renewal because, without the investment and opportunities white neighborhoods got, it grew poorer and more decrepit. Children struggling with housing instability and the trauma of community violence become struggling students without the resources and stability their white peers enjoy. Disinvested neighborhoods see rashes of crime, leading to "broken-windows" overpolicing, which leads to more black drivers stopped – even though, as a police representative told council recently, the prompt wasn't racial bias but simply, neutrally, "going where the crime is." It's not conscious or willing, but "rational" decision-making creates cycles of disparity that carry through generations. That's systemic.

Fixing that can't just be a matter of better, more "rational" policy going forward. There has to be corrective action to undo the factors that feed it. At the level of the biggest wrongs – the legacy of slavery and segregation – that's most likely going to be federal and state action. But Asheville has its wrongs to repair, too, most obviously the management of its school district and the economic impact of the urban renewal projects of the 1960s and '70s. The Racial Justice Coalition resolution passed by council in July spells many of these out, as well as laying goals for public discussion and a broader national and state advocacy. On council, I would see this process through in a way that centers marginalized community members' voices, is fair and public, and respects the city's fiscal and legal obligations.

2. Do you support Black Asheville Demands call for defunding the APD by 50%? If no, please explain why and if yes, what sort of timeline do you envision to reach that goal?

I do support reducing the police footprint in Asheville, yes, by as much as 50%. As I see it, that means replacing 50% of police interactions – i.e., non-violent minor calls for service – with wraparound supports, unarmed crisis responders and other community programs proven to reduce crime. Those are big complicated changes, and they come with their own public costs – to be clear, costs I believe we should be willing to pay and which will save us, in the long run, with better health and safety for everybody.

But this isn't like slashing your rent check before you find a cheaper place to live. It's a deliberate and interconnected set of sweeping changes to the structure of local government. And so I don't like starting with the goal of a budget line (though I can understand why the Black AVL Demands group took that approach.) Instead I want to start with naming the outcomes we want to achieve: we want to eliminate police killings and abuses of force like those perpetrated on George Floyd, Johnnie Rush, and countless others. We want to end discriminatory and unproductive overpolicing of Black and Brown residents. We want to end the school-to-prison pipeline, the cycle of incarceration and poverty that comes with released past offenders being denied jobs, housing, and freedom. We want to humanely respond to drug addiction, mental-health crises, and homelessness in our community with treatment, housing-first, and other approaches proven to effectively reduce crime. We want accountability from government officers sworn to serve and protect us.

That may come with a budget savings, or not. That may lead to dramatic cuts in police staffing and budgets, or not. My guess is that the replacement supports will cost as much or more as any cuts from the police budget will save, that they'll take time to develop and implement. I don't think council should walk into a vote to cut the budget without those in place. I think we should be wary of unintended consequences actually increasing harm to vulnerable communities in Asheville from cutting without being sure what is being cut and what is replacing it. And I think public input on this decision should be broader and more representative that what it has been so far. If appointed, I wouldn't expect to vote on a big police budget cut this fall or winter, but I would expect to in 2021 or 2022, before the appointed term expires.
In the end, I'd say the costs of the status quo of a heavy, enforcement-centered approach to reducing crime have been hidden and ignored by cities for too long. Not just by Asheville, but in every corner of America. They're costs that fall on marginalized neighbors, the costs of deaths like George Floyd's and Botham Jean's and Breonna Taylor's, the costs of

3. Explain why you want to serve on City Council.

For the better part of the last decade, I have been part of shaping city policy – from starting as a neighborhood leader lobbying city government for needed changes, to serving on city commissions and task forces, to serving on local nonprofit boards in partnership with City of Asheville and regional bodies, to managing sprawling, important, unruly debates about city policies online. My city is what I know, and it's now confronting a set of crises – fiscal, legal, cultural, economic and political – that call for good management and expertise if we're going to get through them. I don't have higher political aspirations. I don't have an agenda or anything to gain personally from the role. I know from long experience it's a taxing and thankless job that gobbles up dedicated work and is only rarely very rewarding. But I have four kids, and I have friends and neighbors who have kids and struggles of their own, and it's important to me – to them – that we make this city safe and fair and prosperous for everybody.

I am currently running in the November city council election and would continue to run if appointed. I've run twice before, cleared city primaries three times, the last time with the 5th highest vote total for any council candidate in Asheville's history. I bring to the job the proven support of thousands of city voters who know I am who I say, I'm fair and willing to listen, and I make good on my word. I owe it to them to serve the best way I can, and that's from a position on council.

4. If selected, how do you plan to communicate and work with the other Council members? To help us understand, please give examples of your working collaboratively in the past.

I've worked in some capacity with nearly every council member of the past decade. I hope council already knows I'm tenacious but not insulting or inflammatory. When we differ, we'll work it out person-to-person. When you disagree, I'll hear you out. When you have a proposal, I'll be excited to help it succeed. I'm progressive in my politics but I don't like the framing of council elections or decisions as the "progressives" vs the "establishments," and in three elections I've never slotted cleanly into either "side," probably to my detriment as a candidate. I like building consensus, and that means working together. I like data, the wonky stuff, and also taking ideas from community input and figuring out how to put them into practice. I don't have political points to score. I've given free advice to my opponents in every election I've run in, whether they took it or not. To me, it's just about getting the city to work.

To that end, as examples of collaboration, I would cite:

- Shepherding the city's Multimodal Master Plan and Transit Master Plan through completion
- Finding funding for various transportation and transit projects and seeing them through completion
- Advancing the city's municipal bond referendum and projects
- Various zoning proposals for density and affordable housing
- Moving pedestrian-priority zones for safe re-opening through various city departments
- Securing city partnership funding for Green Opportunities and other nonprofits
- Helping community input and advocacy for many city policies and budget items
- Representing neighborhood concerns to the city as past co-president of the Coalition of Asheville Neighborhoods
- Serving as chair of the city's Multimodal Transportation Commission, vice chair of the Greenway Committee, member of the Vision Zero Task Force, member of the Riverfront Leadership Round Table, alternate delegate to the Land of Sky Regional Council, officer of the county Democratic Party, etc.

5. What do you consider the most pressing problem, need, or cause for the citizens of Asheville today? How would you approach its resolution or champion the cause?

To me, the city's biggest crisis is that the old tasks and tools of local government aren't working any more at creating a safe, prosperous, well-planned and well-managed city for everybody. Inequality is growing – that's a national, even a global, problem, yes, but it's especially focused in this desirable mountain hotspot. The normal toolkit of incentives and zoning isn't creating affordable housing or a balanced economy that sustains us. According to Census estimates, the city is bleeding away diversity: Black community members, young people, artists and artisans, service workers, retirees, and small business owners are failing to keep a toehold here, to our detriment as a community. We're beginning to see how the impacts of climate change, the deferral of maintenance, the unequal distribution of public investment, the costs of heavy-handed law enforcement are increasing inequality, benefitting some at the expense of others. The anger at hotel developers, at service-industry employers, at the police and at council themselves, to me, are all coming from that same frustration: local government ought to be looking out for everybody; it ought to be fighting to protect and lift everybody; and it's struggling and unprepared for the weight of all these crisis hitting now.

The solution isn't to throw up our hands. Yes, the city's being short-changed by federal and state leaders who have even more power and responsibility than we do. Yes, local government's "hands are tied" (a hateful phrase) legally and financially from some of the more direct actions. That's always been the case. The city needs managers who know the law, workers and strategists. Yes, it needs courageous and good-hearted people, but I'd argue it's always had lots of those. Being courageous doesn't make you Napoleon. I've spent the last decade learning and listening to the experts about what we can and can't do, listening to my neighbors about what they want and need. I've watched what works and doesn't in other cities grappling with the same problems. I have the research and receipts. I am an experienced financial manager, and I would go as far as to say I bring a lot of public trust in my ability to get things done fairly. I won't let us down.