City of Asheville
City Council Vacancy Application Form

Your name: Erin Connors Home Phone #: 828.258.6035

Street Address: 9 Naylor Rd City: Asheville Zip Code: 28806

Mailing Address (if different): 360 Asheville School Rd

Employer: self-employed

Position: Tutor and curriculum consultant Office Phone # 828.258.6035

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

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

Race: White Sex: Female Age: 42

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)

eSigned via SeamlessDocs.com
Erin Connors
Key: 905995faaf5d01d33d35162fadd2ad0f

Applicant Signature
Date: 08/18/2020

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

Erin Connors

(She/Her)

Experience

2017 – Present

At-Home Parent, Community Volunteer, and Freelance Educator

- Member of Board of Directors at Hanger Hall (President since July 1, 2020)
- PTO Treasurer, Hall Fletcher Elementary
- Companion, 12 Baskets Café, a program of the Asheville Poverty Initiative
- Curriculum Consultant for Asheville School and The Athena Project

Project Wellspring: I maintain a steady pile of writing projects, including a short story collection and a book with the working title of Project Wellspring, based on interviews with 25+ women who have faced challenges in their reproductive lives.

2007 – 2017 ASHEVILLE SCHOOL

2014 – 2017 Dean of Academics

- Supervised and supported five department chairs in areas of curricular development, faculty evaluation, course placement, and academic policy for a student body of 275
- Developed, implemented, and supported practices for evaluation and professional development for approximately 60 faculty members, including critical friends' groups, peer observation triads, and FolioCollaborative training
- Administered ChallengeSuccess survey to the student body, using results to redesign curricular offerings to address student stress and well-being
- Supported the development of six new courses to meet enrollment needs
- Staff Liaison for Head of School Search Committee (January 2017-May 2018)

2010 – 2017 Humanities Faculty

- Lead teacher for the interdisciplinary European Studies team

2007 – 2009 Learning Center Director

- Managed case files, learning profiles, and accommodations for students with learning differences; aided in creating and implementing action plans for struggling students as member of Student Affairs Committee

2001 – 2007 BLAKE MIDDLE SCHOOL

2006 – 2007 Assistant Director & Guidance Counselor (interim)
2001 – 2007 English & German Faculty

Education

Master of Social Science
Maxwell School of Citizenship, Syracuse University

Bachelor of Arts, German Studies
Amherst College

Contact

9 Naylor Rd.
Asheville, NC 28806
828.258.6035
erinconnors77@gmail.com

Erin Connors

Experience

Selected Professional Development

- *Mastery Transcript Consortium*, October 2016
- *STLinSTL: Summit for Transformative Learning,* St. Louis MO, June 2016
- *White Privilege Conference*, March 2015 and April 2016
- *Bard Institute Thinking and Writing Workshops* - annually 2010 -2017
- Presenter, *Lovett American Studies Institute*, June 2012
- *Columbia Teachers College Klingenstein Summer Institute,* Lawrenceville NJ, June 2006
- *"Heart of Coaching" Classroom Observation*
- *Language Assistant & Fulbright Teaching Assistant,* Austria, 1999-2001

Selected Publications

- "Kerala: A South Indian Lesson in Loving My In-Laws," *Wanderful* (sheswanderful.com), November 2018.
- "Refractions and Prisms: Reflections of Privilege in a Public School's Fight for a Voice." *Understanding and Dismantling Privilege,* Spring 2017.
- Peer reviewer for the journal *Understanding and Dismantling Privilege.*
- "Hall Fletcher's Rare Success," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 2016.
- Blog, writingforchocolate.com.

Other

After many (many) years of study, I finally learned to speak fluent German. In fits and starts I try to tackle Malayalam, the South Indian language of my spouse's family. Though it was a steep adjustment from riding the Minnesota flats to the Appalachian foothills, I'm happy to say that these days I'm back on my bike with some regularity – and even completing my first sprint triathlon last summer.

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.**

At the risk of self-indulgence, I'd like to share a piece I wrote after George Floyd was killed in my hometown, which ended up to be kind of a mediation on the role of systemic racism in my life. I've attached it as a supplement to this application, but the short answer is yes, I believe systemic racism and oppression exist, as well as their most insidious ability to exist nearly invisible to those who benefit from them.

Marrying and starting a family with a person of color 10+ years ago increased my attunement to the segregation of our public spaces. When I first encountered the visible diversity at Hall Fletcher Elementary, where our kids are in school, it brought me to tears – it was so striking, how rare it is.

A few weeks ago my spouse and I were downtown. It was COVID times, so the streets were quiet and the parking was ample. In Pritchard Park, a Black Motown-style band was performing. The crowd was mixed, more mixed than we'd seen it in our thirteen years here. It was as if, with the (mostly white) newcomers and tourists cleared out, the city's people of color had enough space to move.

What would a city be like, I wondered, if everyone could feel this freedom to move freely all the time? How vibrant it would be, how alive. How much richer our connections with it, with each other.

What does it all mean in the context of equity and inclusion? I'm not sure. But I am sure of this: if we aren't looking critically at our institutional norms, we are bound to welcome some while excluding others. And when some in a community are excluded, the entire community misses out on those contributions. It cannot help but fall short of its potential.

I support reparations in the larger sense, as an acknowledgment of the country's history with Black Americans that ranges from the denial of opportunity to racial violence, imprisonment, and slavery. In a place like Asheville, where recent policies of so-called "urban renewal" concretely and obviously co-opted Black-owned land and businesses, the case for reparations is all the more clear-cut.

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'm very enthusiastic about the possibility of redirecting funds from policing to other community programming -- my bias is towards early education and childcare supports -- and I would love to see a less militarized police force.

As to the question of the 50% decrease, I would want to gain a deeper understanding of the expenditures before committing to a position. For example, in a recent interview, Chicago mayor Lori Lightfoot expressed concerns that steep budget cuts would mean layoffs. Layoffs would most affect those with least seniority, and, in Chicago, at least, that would most affect officers who identify as BIPOC, undoing recent efforts to build a more diverse force.

I don't know whether this would be the case in Asheville, but I cite is as an example of potential unintended consequences. I participated in a recent budget workshop with Just Economics around this question, and, though instructive, it was hard to get a full picture just looking at line items.

So while I definitely support greater investment in community development and interventions that do not involve a militarized police, I would take it as part of the responsibility to pursue a more secure understanding of how cuts would play out, to make sure they don't unintentionally undermine the aims.

With all that said, in reading the stories of other municipalities who have defunded or disbanded the police, it appears to me that big moves (e.g. Camden, NJ) have been more successful than smaller, more gradual reform attempts. Based on these experiences, if the Council reached the conclusion that the monies could be better spent elsewhere, I would favor a quicker timeline (perhaps a year or two) over a more drawn-out one.

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

Like many people, I felt compelled toward greater civic involvement in the wake of the 2016 election. I quit my hours-rich job as a boarding school teacher and administrator to get more deeply involved in my kids' school and other community groups.

The intervening years, and especially the COVID crisis, have illuminated a deepening reliance on local governments as the federal level proves itself too unwieldy and fractured for effective action. Local governments, though perhaps less "sexy" than national politics, have always been the place to enact real change. I believe that now, even more so, we will be looking to local entities for policy, guidance, and action.

But this is all theoretical, a comment on the contemporary nature of governance. Why do I want to serve, specifically? It goes back to my answer to #1. I imagine how vibrant and prosperous our region could be if everyone could participate fully. I want that for my children, and I want to be part of building it.

In a conversation with my spouse a few weeks ago, I said, "I'd like to serve in public office, but I have zero interest in running a campaign." (I listened with great interest to Malcolm Gladwell's "Revisionist History" on how the work of campaigning and the work of office are two very different skill sets.) The announcement of this opportunity was very exciting to me.

All of that said, when I saw Rob Thomas on the list of interested people, I almost decided not to apply. His work with the Racial Justice Coalition has been phenomenal. Not knowing how the final applicant pool would shape up, I forged ahead -- but if he's in the running I hope the seat goes to him.

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.**

In my work as a school administrator and Board member, I'm proud of my track record of building positive collaborative working relationships. More introverted than otherwise, I'm at my best in small groups and one-on-one conversations. I enjoy the camaraderie of tackling work with folks with whom I've built a personal relationship, and vice versa -- getting to know others more deeply through working on something together.

For example, when I became the Academic Dean at Asheville School, my first step was to meet individually with each department head. This gave me a sense of each person's priorities for their department and the school; our team's goals arose from synthesizing those parts into a whole. (These priorities included examining student homework load and stress levels, exploring more elective offerings, especially in the sciences, and reconsidering the way we teach and assess the habits of scholarship.) I've brought a similar approach to professional development work with teachers, Board work, and in fact, in my classroom, where I leaned toward a constructivist style of building shared understanding.

I think a practice like this is most representative of my style. I would bring a lot of energy to building individual relationships with fellow Council members and constituents, and trust in those to build capacity for larger collaboration.

A few other notes on communication style: In a discussion, a strength of mine is asking questions that help distill the issues at hand. I can also be a lively presenter and am comfortable speaking in front of large groups.

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?**

If I had to pick just one issue, I would say the devastation wrought by Covid-19 on our tourist-dependent economy.

But this crisis has revealed the interconnectedness of all our systems: our economic woes are our health disparities are our racial injustices are our environmental threats. Comprehending this is both discouraging and exhilarating. Right now, we are flailing, and it feels as if we're going under. But this interconnectedness suggests that if we can find and push the right levers, we may be able to address multiple problems at once.

I'm inspired here by the 12 Baskets Café in West Asheville. In rescuing food from area food services and restaurants and serving it on a by-donation basis in a café setting, 12 Baskets seeks to address food insecurity, food waste and its environmental consequences, and the social barriers that isolate us – all at the same time.

As a City Council member, I'd be especially interested in seeking out, uncovering, and developing these kinds of elegant, multipronged solutions and championing them as win-win-wins.

What if greater investment in community programs meant that the police officer's work was less stressful, and that job became more attractive to a wider range of people? It would be interesting to hear from the police themselves what kinds of supports they envision could be helpful.

What if a society could pay underemployed people a living wage for some of the work currently shouldered by volunteers and underpaid staffers and underfunded nonprofits? A move like this could provide a sustainable income while also increasing the capacity of these critical community organizations.

I understand City Council's has a limited purview; I'm just giving a few examples of the type of synergistic, systems-oriented thinking that would motivate me.