

City Council Candidate Evaluation Rubric

2026 City Council Election Cycle

Approved: June 4, 2026

How to use this rubric

Each category is scored on a 0–3 scale. The italicized description beneath each heading explains the committee’s position and what we are looking for. Score the candidate based on the quality, specificity, and honesty of their answer — not simply whether they reach the “right” conclusion. Ratings for incumbents should prioritize their actual actions on Council over campaign platforms or rhetoric.

Score	What it means
0 — No answer / opposes	Did not answer, gave a non-answer, or actively opposes the committee’s position. <i>For incumbents: Campaign platform directly contradicts their own actions on Council.</i>
1 — Vague / weak	Acknowledges the issue but offers only generalities, platitudes, or hedged language.
2 — Solid / partial	Solid position with at least some specificity. May not address all dimensions of the issue.
3 — Strong / specific	Specific, well-reasoned, and fully aligned with the committee’s expectations on this issue.

Maximum score: 30 points (10 categories × 3)

1. Housing

The committee supports proactive city action to expand housing for all — especially low-income residents, the unhoused, seniors, disabled individuals, young families, and students. Candidates should recognize Fairfax City's housing shortage and demonstrate support for a range of housing types, including single-family homes, townhomes, and apartments. We look for candidates who go beyond platitudes and engage with real policy tools: zoning reform, ADUs, partnerships with nonprofits and the private sector, and funding mechanisms for affordable housing development. We look for candidates who do not stigmatize homelessness, but look towards innovative solutions to address this issue.

0 — No answer / opposes	No meaningful answer, or opposes city-level housing expansion and affordable housing policy.
1 — Vague / weak	General statements of support for housing with no concrete proposals or contradictory statements listed.
2 — Solid / partial	Supports specific tools (e.g. inclusionary zoning, land trusts, density bonuses) for at least one income tier. May not address certain types of housing.
3 — Strong / specific	Concrete, specific proposals spanning all income tiers. Addresses a multitude of housing needs. Articulates a clear role for both public action and private-sector partnerships.
Notes	

2. Diversity & Inclusion

The committee believes strongly in the values of diversity and inclusion. City boards and commissions should reflect the full makeup of Fairfax City, and City events should celebrate its cultural richness. Candidates should speak directly to the protection of our most vulnerable communities, including our immigrant and LGBTQ+ neighbors, from threats at the federal level under the current administration. An ideal candidate does not equivocate on these values; they name them clearly and commit to defending them using the city's available authority. Candidates should publicly support the three constitutional amendments on the ballot.

0 — No answer / opposes	No answer, or no demonstrated interest in diversity in city governance, events, or community protection.
1 — Vague / weak	Vague commitment to diversity with no concrete recruitment plans, event ideas, or language about protecting vulnerable communities.
2 — Solid / partial	Proposes at least one concrete step toward diversifying board pipelines or expanding inclusive city events. Acknowledges threats to immigrant or LGBTQ+ communities but does not specify city-level responses. Supports three amendments in some capacity.
3 — Strong / specific	Specific, actionable plan for diversifying board and commission recruitment. A vision for expanding or creating inclusive city events. Explicit commitment to using city authority to protect immigrant and LGBTQ+ residents from adverse federal actions. Supports three amendments in a clear and public capacity.
Notes	

3. Environment & Stormwater Management

The committee believes the City has a direct responsibility to address local environmental challenges, including stormwater management and green infrastructure, as well as broader climate commitments at the city's scale. We want candidates who understand Fairfax City's specific infrastructure vulnerabilities and connect them to a larger vision for sustainability.

0 — No answer / opposes	No answer, or dismisses city-level environmental responsibility and climate action.
1 — Vague / weak	General pro-environment position with no city-specific actions, proposals, or infrastructure acknowledgments.
2 — Solid / partial	Proposes some concrete steps on climate action. May name a specific initiative without a broader vision.
3 — Strong / specific	Specific, practical proposals on local stormwater and green infrastructure AND a broader climate action vision appropriate to the city's scale. Demonstrates knowledge of local vulnerabilities and names concrete sustainability initiatives.
Notes	

4. City Employees

The committee believes city employees deserve fair treatment, competitive pay and benefits, and the right to organize. Three specific commitments are evaluated: (1) emergency pay for city workers during state-declared emergencies; (2) support for an ordinance providing city employees the right to collective bargaining; and (3)

demonstrated respect for city staff — including in public statements, work sessions, and day-to-day conduct. How a candidate talks about and treats city employees is a reflection of their values as a leader.

0 — No answer / opposes	Opposes emergency pay and collective bargaining rights; demonstrates little or no respect for city staff in conduct or public statements.
1 — Vague / weak	Supports one of the three commitments; hedging or evasive on the others.
2 — Solid / partial	Clearly at least two of the commitments. Expresses openness to collective bargaining. Generally respectful toward city staff but does not address this explicitly.
3 — Strong / specific	Commits to emergency pay and supporting a collective bargaining ordinance. Explicitly addresses and demonstrates respect for city employees, in both platform and past conduct.
Notes	

5. Relationship with Local, State & Regional Partners

The committee values the City's service agreements and partnerships with Fairfax County, Fairfax County Public Schools, and regional bodies including George Mason University, NOVA Parks, and others. We also value the city's relationships with its state delegation and state agencies like VDOT. Candidates should understand why these partnerships matter — the city's small size, Virginia's Dillon Rule framework, and the importance of state and federal grants all make strong intergovernmental relationships a practical necessity. We want candidates who will actively steward and grow these relationships, not take actions that put them at risk.

0 — No answer / opposes	Suggests reducing, renegotiating, or walking away from existing partnership agreements without clear justification. Does not demonstrate an understanding of the city's intergovernmental dependencies. Supports or has supported actions that cause serious harm to the city's relationships and outside funding.
1 — Vague / weak	Commits to maintaining existing partnerships but offers nothing beyond status quo preservation. No discussion of the Dillon Rule, grants, or the strategic value of these relationships.
2 — Solid / partial	Commits to maintaining key relationships and articulates a general interest in strengthening them. Shows some awareness of why these partnerships matter to the city's function.
3 — Strong / specific	Clear, active vision for maintaining and growing county, FCPS, state, and regional partnerships. Names specific relationships or initiatives and demonstrates working knowledge of the city's intergovernmental landscape, including Dillon Rule constraints and grant dependency.
Notes	

6. Growth, Zoning & Development

The committee believes smart, forward-looking growth is essential to the City's long-term vitality. We support the use of Small Area Plans to guide development, welcoming new housing and businesses, and investing in key infrastructure. Candidates should demonstrate a willingness to push back against reflexive opposition to change, prioritize the city's future needs over nostalgia for the status quo, and resist the kind of stagnation that leaves cities behind.

0 — No answer / opposes	Opposes new development broadly, offers no coherent growth vision, or is clearly beholden to NIMBY interests with no counter-balance. Consistently skeptical or outright against all development.
1 — Vague / weak	Vague support for some growth with no engagement with specific tools, trade-offs, or planning mechanisms. Does not address the tension between preservation and development. Occasionally uses NIMBY dogwhistles.
2 — Solid / partial	Thoughtfully engages with the Small Area Plan process or specific development trade-offs. General support development and usually looks towards the future instead of the past.
3 — Strong / specific	Specific, forward-looking vision for smart growth. Demonstrates willingness to push back on reflexive NIMBYism, names key infrastructure priorities, and can articulate a concrete approach to guiding development in a way that serves the whole community. Clearly understands the need for growth and will not back down to a small mob of NIMBYs.
Notes	

7. Transportation

The committee supports building a city that is safe and accessible for people who use all forms of transportation. We want candidates with concrete ideas for improving the CUE bus system, making it genuinely possible to live, work, and move around Fairfax City without a car, and expanding EV infrastructure throughout the city.

0 — No answer / opposes	No answer, or a car-centric platform that dismisses or deprioritizes non-car transportation modes. Actively opposes pedestrian, bike, and transit infrastructure.
1 — Vague / weak	General support for walkability and transit without any specific proposals or investments named.
2 — Solid / partial	Concrete proposals for improving at least one mode — CUE improvements, bike infrastructure, pedestrian safety, or EV charging expansion.
3 — Strong / specific	An actionable, multi-modal plan addressing pedestrian and bike infrastructure, CUE system improvements, and concrete steps to expand EV infrastructure and reduce car dependency in the city.
Notes	

8. Charter Reform

The committee believes the City of Fairfax's charter and governing structure should be treated as living documents, subject to periodic, thoughtful re-examination as the city grows and the demands on its elected officials evolve. We do not mandate support for any specific reform, but we look for candidates who approach structural governance questions with genuine openness to improvements. Areas the committee considers worth examining include, but are not limited to, term length for Mayor and Council, the use of staggered terms to provide continuity across election cycles, the role of the Mayor in breaking ties or otherwise participating in votes, and other structural innovations that could strengthen the city's governance and long-term institutional stability

0 — No answer / opposes	No meaningful engagement with charter reform questions, or reflexive opposition to any structural change. Treats the current charter as settled rather than subject to democratic re-examination
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1 — Vague / weak	Acknowledges that charter reform is worth discussing but offers no specific areas of interest, no reasoning, and no willingness to name what kinds of structural changes they would consider.
2 — Solid / partial	Demonstrates genuine openness to structural reform and can speak to at least one specific area worth examining — such as term length, staggered terms, or the Mayor's voting role. May not have engaged with the full range of reform questions
3 — Strong / specific	Thoughtful, well-reasoned openness to re-examining the charter across multiple structural dimensions. Can articulate why reform in specific areas would strengthen the city's governance, and demonstrates that this position is grounded in an understanding of how the current structure works and where its limitations lie.
Notes	

9. Responsible Governance & Ethics

The committee believes good governance is a prerequisite for everything else on this rubric. We want candidates who demonstrate a genuine commitment to competent, ethical, and accountable decision-making. The commitments should be not just in their campaign platforms but in how they have behaved in prior public or professional roles. Candidates should show respect toward city staff, understand the importance of the city's intergovernmental relationships, and provide stable, professional leadership. The committee also supports the recommendation that rules and procedures currently set by each incoming Council be codified into the City Code so they are not subject to unilateral modification by each newly elected Council.

0 — No answer / opposes	History of unprofessional behavior, disrespectful conduct toward staff, or dismissal of ethics concerns. No demonstrated commitment to competent or accountable governance.
1 — Vague / weak	Pays lip service to professional conduct and accountability without naming any specific practices, reforms, or behaviors they would model or champion.
2 — Solid / partial	Articulates specific commitments to a professional government. Generally respectful and professional in conduct.
3 — Strong / specific	Strong, specific vision for ethical and professional governance, with concrete proposals and a demonstrated record of principled, professional conduct in past roles. Clearly understands governance as distinct from campaigning.
Notes	

10. City Budget Priorities

The committee wants to know what candidates would actually protect, and what they would cut, when the budget gets tight. We are looking for intellectual honesty: candidates who can name real trade-offs, acknowledge fiscal constraints, and demonstrate they understand the difference between campaign promises and governing decisions. Vague pledges to 'prioritize everything' or 'eliminate waste and fraud' are not acceptable answers. Candidates who plan to grow city services should be able to identify which taxes or fees they would raise to pay for them. Candidates who plan to cut taxes or fees should be equally clear about what services they would reduce. Candidates should clearly understand the current short-term budget outlook and have a long-term plan to address it through policies like revenue diversification.

0 — No answer / opposes	No substantive engagement with budget trade-offs, or promises to protect all spending categories without acknowledging constraints. Relies on 'waste and fraud' framing as a substitute for real answers.
1 — Vague / weak	Names broad budget priorities (e.g. 'public safety' or 'schools') without any discussion of what they would deprioritize, cut, or fund through new revenue.
2 — Solid / partial	Demonstrates awareness of real budget constraints and is willing to name at least one genuine trade-off or a specific revenue or spending position. Generally clear-eyed about fiscal reality.
3 — Strong / specific	Specific, honest articulation of budget priorities with clear acknowledgment of trade-offs. Can explain the reasoning behind their choices and demonstrates working familiarity with the City's actual revenue sources, expenditure categories, and fiscal pressures.
Notes	

11. Bonus Categories

Candidates will receive additional points to their score for each section that applies to them.

1 Point	Has been an active member of the City of Fairfax Democratic Committee in the past but is not currently an active member
3 Points	Has applied for a recommendation on their own behalf
3 Points	Is currently an active dues paying member of the City of Fairfax Democratic Committee.

Score Summary

Candidate name: _____

#	Category	Score (0–3)
1	Housing	
2	Diversity & Inclusion	
3	Environment & Stormwater Management	
4	City Employees	
5	Relationship with Local, State & Regional Partners	
6	Growth, Zoning & Development	
7	Transportation	
8	Charter Reform	
9	Responsible Governance & Ethics	

10	City Budget Priorities	
11	Bonus Points	
	TOTAL	/ 30