

Spartanburg City Council member interviews: Jamie Fulmer, District 4

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City Council member Jamie Fulmer shares his perspective on Spartanburg's challenging last year and where we go from here



Recently, we asked Spartanburg City Council members to share their thoughts about the City's experiences navigating the challenges Spartanburg has seen over the past year by participating in a Q&A blog series. Council members were asked eight questions, covering both the unprecedented year our community has faced and looking forward to how we will emerge from it and move forward. To view other City Council members' interviews, [check our main City News page here](#).

2020 was a difficult year on a number of fronts, to say the least. From your perspective as a member of City Council, what issue did you find to be the most challenging and why?

Council member Jamie Fulmer: During any given year, there are difficult issues that come before Council and they require careful thought, discussion and hard work. I think what made 2020 so especially challenging is that we had a number of major issues that basically hit all at once. From the tornado in February, the pandemic which started in March, and the social justice issues that came to a head in early summer, we were dealing with unprecedented major challenges that were complex and non-stop throughout the year. All the while, we still needed to stay focused on the day-to-day constituent issues that are extremely important to the residents of our City. I think our city team has done an amazing job stepping up to the moment, but also keeping the engine of city government running effectively.

Long-term, has your view of how the City targets its resources changed as a result of dealing with the issues Council has faced over the past year? If so, how?

JF: I am not sure my view has changed at this point, but I do believe that the past year has underscored the importance of always being cautious with our resources. We were in a better position than many other municipalities to deal with the issues we faced, and I think that is testament to our Director of Finance and Budget Dennis Locke and his team. As a result of our careful approach, we were able to withstand the impact 2020 and position our city for a strong 2021 and beyond.

Despite the difficulties we've faced, the City made progress in some areas over the past 12 months. What accomplishments stand out to you?

JF: Wow. There are many, but a few stand out to me. I think the way our City Council and community as a whole came together on our resolution entitled, “Healing, Reconciling, and Unity. A Pathway to a More Equitable Spartanburg,” was a huge step forward and shows the character of the people who live here.

Also, I think the progress we have made on the economic development front, despite the headwinds created by the pandemic and resulting recession, has been amazing and sets the table for an exciting future. Specifically, we have seen several new investments made over the course of the past year including new downtown developments, several new mixed income housing developments throughout the city, completed the Highland Master Plan, and initiated our Comprehensive Planning effort.

There are more energized and engaged citizens paying attention to the work of their city government than ever before. How does that level of engagement help the process? Has it changed your approach to your role?

JF: It is a great honor to serve the residents of District 4 and the City of Spartanburg. I take my role very seriously and work hard to be a good steward of the public trust that was invested in me by my constituents. I think it is wonderful to see engaged and passionate citizens working for the betterment of our community. Civic engagement has always been one of Spartanburg’s strengths and I am so pleased to see even more folks from throughout our city with a diversity of perspectives share their time and talents.

There are so many ways to serve in in Spartanburg, from running for office, to serving on City Boards and Commissions, to volunteering for one of our many wonderful non-profit organizations. In Spartanburg our residents have so many different ways to make an impact. That is all very exciting, and I believe this involvement binds us together and makes us better as a community.

One area where that increase in engagement is especially noticeable is in discussion of growth and development issues and decisions. What is your general take on the current rate of growth in the city right now?

JF: Outcomes are always better when we have involvement and input from our citizens, and I believe we have an effective process in place that encourages and appreciates engagement. Generally speaking, I think we are currently growing at a good pace. As the speed picks up, we need to make sure that we have the infrastructure to accommodate our growth so it is sustainable for the long haul. We also need to make sure that our growth provides opportunities for all of our citizens and positively impacts all areas of our city.

This is an exciting time to be living in Spartanburg!

What steps can we take to ensure that Spartanburg's current growth is both sustainable and equitable going forward? Where are our opportunities for that growth?

JF: I think that our Comprehensive Plan, which is being developed with input from residents all throughout our city, will be a huge asset in helping to chart our future growth and ensure that it is both sustainable and equitable. We need to continue to build on the momentum of the past few years to improve the available supply of housing of all types, especially affordable and workforce housing. We need to continue our economic development efforts in order to attract as many good paying jobs as possible so that every citizen has the opportunity to pursue upward mobility.

From your perspective, what 2-3 issues are the biggest priorities for the City in 2021?

JF: Well, we must never lose site of the fact that our first job as a municipal government is to provide the highest caliber of services possible, things like protecting our citizens with world-class police and fire services, keeping our roads safe and well maintained, providing high caliber parks and recreation facilities, and ensuring a public transportation system that meets the needs of its customers.... the list goes on. It is what I refer to as blocking and tackling of city government.

Next, I believe that we will continue to deal with the impact of the pandemic for the remainder of the year and perhaps longer.

Beyond that, I would like to see us reclaim the momentum of our economic development, particularly in our downtown corridor. See the effort to get a grocery store on the Southside get across the goal-line, and continue our attempts to pursue a diverse stock of good paying jobs for all in Spartanburg.

Finally, we need to stay focused on our efforts to improve the health and wellness outcomes of those in our city who have been left behind.

From your perspective, what 2-3 issues are the biggest priorities for the City over the next five years?

JF: I cannot wait to see what Spartanburg will look like in five years! It is going to be amazing. We need to focus on planning for the future and work with all stakeholders to strengthen and diversify our economy in order to make Spartanburg a residence of choice for individuals, families and businesses.

Over the next five years we must:

- Continue our work to build a thriving downtown
- Ensure that we have safe and thriving neighborhoods throughout our city
- Support our vibrant and diverse cultural community

