

## Spartanburg City Council member interviews: Ruth Littlejohn, District 3

TUESDAY, MARCH 16

### City Council member Ruth Littlejohn shares her 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. Below is the first of this series, featuring Ruth Littlejohn, City Council member representing District 3. Follow [this link to download a printable version of this interview](#).*

**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 Ruth Littlejohn:** The most challenging issue for me in 2020 was the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected many of my constituents, among them are many seniors and many essential workers. The virus became personal when it affected me and my family members. The economic impact of COVID-19 has been very heart rendering as many people have been laid off due to illness and other problems related to the virus. COVID-19 has left a great mark on all of us---hopefully, we will learn from this experience and better prepare for the unexpected as much as we can.

**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?**

**RL:** Yes! My view of how the City targets its resources, changed as a result of dealing with the many challenges it has faced over the past year. While COVID-19 was a primary challenge, other issues like homelessness, food deserts and issues of inequities (regarding old social wounds) have caused the city to relook how/when it targets its resources. I believe the city has had to look carefully at how it prioritizes certain resources and how they can address many of the issues that were not typical or were unexpected.

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

**RL:** Despite its difficulties, the City has made many accomplishments: (a) housing and business development continues to move at a steady pace; (b) another was approving and paving the way for the transformative re-construction of the old Mary H. Wright School building. The former school building is now listed on the local Historical Registry (the first nonresidential building to be added to the Local Registry in Spartanburg) and the Federal and State Historical Registry; (c) also, partnering with OneSpartanburg has proven to be a giant step in the right direction.

**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?**

**RL:** I am pleased to see that our citizens are engaged and paying attention to the work of their city government. The increase in the level of energy and engagement from citizens certainly helps the process of running city government. As a result of this renewed engagement, city officials must focus more on being inclusive, which means considering and including all citizens during its Comprehensive Planning. In 2020, the City made a collaborative effort to get input from all citizens and all communities impacted by the Comprehensive Plan.

The City works on behalf of all its citizens, and it is essential that citizens continue to voice their concerns and issues. The level of energy and engagement has not changed my approach as a Council member. I have always engaged and solicited input and information from my constituents. I consistently try my best to reach out to as many people as I can. As always, my focus is to be open and accessible to all my constituents.

**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?**

**RL:** I am so excited to see the uptick in development and growth in downtown Spartanburg and neighboring communities. A tremendous amount of progress has occurred in just a short period of time. I am amazed at all the new development that has taken place in less than seven years. **Excitement** best describes the progress that is currently being made. I do believe the increase in development and growth means the City should also focus on the gateways into the city. **Beautification** of our gateways into the city are essential to how visitors view our city---first impressions are often lasting impressions.

**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?**

**RL:** Spartanburg can make sure its *current growth* is both sustainable and equitable by promoting affordable housing and adequate living wages. This is especially important for our essential workers--- who we depend on most. I believe we can and should do more to hire and retain young minorities in our workforce. The south side of town is one area that comes to mind when talking about opportunities for growth.

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

**RL:** Priorities for 2021, I believe dealing with COVID-19 remains the biggest priority, followed by recovery of our economy (jobs and the fallouts caused by the devastating impact of the virus) and addressing issues of fairness and equity in housing, business development and workplace advancement.

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

**RL:** Over the next five years I believe the City should continue to focus on growth (expansion) and development.