

City of Asheville  
BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS  
Application Form

Name of board or commission: City Council

Name: George E. Keller

Home phone: 828-252-4423

Street Address: 84 W Walnut Street, #604

City: Asheville

Zip: 28801

Employer: retired

Resident of: Asheville and Buncombe County

Race: Caucasian

Sex: Male

Age: 70

US Citizen: yes

Residence location: Central

Aware of opening: Current Volunteer, eNews, Newspaper, Radio, and many others.

Expertise: Technical, Community Contacts.

Education: See attached resume'.

Experience: See attached resume'.

Reasons for interest and other factors: I have lived in Asheville 9-1/2 years, 8-1/2 years of which have been in the Central Business District.

I witness first-hand, daily, the interactions between small-business owners and their employees, residents, tourists, and the nere-do-wells who flock to Asheville for handouts of food, lodging, social services and cash. I live in an historic building regularly tagged by graffiti vandals. I have helped clean the cigarette butts off of the sidewalks and streets, only to see them reappear within hours. I have talked to those who have tried to bring small businesses to Asheville and have been discouraged by their tales of tangling with a City administration that frustrates their efforts at every turn.

I have sat in front of the Civic Center and conversed with the folks from all around the USA who have traveled to Asheville to see a show at the Civic Center and then have stayed for food and lodging. I am one of many downtown residents who moved here for the sheer beauty of the place and the convenience of being able to walk to most of my errand-destinations.

I can bring to the Council a first-hand, pragmatic viewpoint and continuing experience of life in the Central Business District and its joys and sorrows.

Signature



Date: XXX

e-mail: [gakeller@gakeller.com](mailto:gakeller@gakeller.com)

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828-259-5601

828-259-5499

## **Resume of George E. Keller**

Education: 1956 - 1965, Georgia Institute of Technology, BS, MS, and PhD degrees in Physics.

Work Experience: 1965 – 1967 on active duty in the US Army at White Sands Missile Range. 1967 - 1998 Ballistic Research Laboratory and Army Research Laboratory, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. Research Physicist, working in laboratory astrophysics, in-situ stratospheric measurements of positive ions, chemical kinetics, and (for 17 years) interior ballistics: gun muzzle flash, thermal management, development of interior ballistic models and codes, and charge ignition mechanisms. Retired in 1998. Moved to Asheville, NC in 1999.

Professional Memberships: American Physical Society, Sigma Xi, President of the University of North Carolina at Asheville Chapter of Sigma Xi from 2003-2005.

Professional References: Available upon request

Computer capabilities: MS Excel, MS PowerPoint, MS Word, HTML, Paint Shop Pro, MS Publisher, FORTRAN, OpenOffice, Thunderbird, Firefox.

### **Professional activities since moving to Asheville:**

1. Several consulting contracts regarding interior ballistics
2. Adjunct Professor at UNC-Asheville, teaching introductory physics each Summer 2001-2008 (and planned for 2009)
3. Design and implementation of the Buncombe County GOP web site
4. Design, implementation, and maintenance of the 11th North Carolina Congressional District GOP web site
5. 2002-2006, implementation and maintenance of the RiverLink of Asheville web site. Winner of RiverLink's 2003 Critical Link Award.

### **Community Involvement in Asheville:**

1. 2001-2003, received small-group facilitator training, and facilitated an Asheville-Buncombe VISION Community Dialogues small group in the Autumn of 2001 and in the Autumn of 2002. In 2003, vice-chair of the Community Dialogues Steering Committee. In 2004, chair of the Community Dialogues Steering Committee and VISION Board member.
2. 2001, completed Leadership Asheville for Seniors. Since 2001, member of Leadership Asheville Forum
3. 2003-2005 and 2008, President of Buncombe County Republican Men's Club
4. 2003-2005, Vice Chair, Buncombe County Republican Party
5. 2005-2007, Chairman, Buncombe County Republican Party
6. 2007 – present, Secretary, Buncombe County Republican Party
7. 2005-2007, Member of the Asheville Civic Center Commission.
8. 2007-present, Chairman of the Asheville Civic Center Commission
9. 2007-present, President of the Board of the Old Penney's Condo Building Owners Association
10. 2005-present, Member of Asheville Sister Cities, Inc.
11. Member of Downtown Asheville Residential Neighbors (DARN)
12. Member of Asheville Downtown Association

Attachment to the application of George E. Keller

### **1. What motivates you to apply for this position?**

In the past, I have been urged by friends and acquaintances to run for a seat on the Council. I have always declined, for there were other activities in my life that seemed more important. This year, because of the state of the economy, the tasks of the Council will be so difficult and pressing that I cannot just turn my back and say "Let someone else deal with it." I know that I can contribute positively to City governance based on the experiences of my lifetime.

I wore out lots of sneaker rubber collecting signatures for the Let Asheville Vote drive, which taught me that the citizens of Asheville truly care about their City government, even if they seem very quiet at times. The most impressive signature that I gathered? As I stood on the corner of Battery Park and Haywood, a sewage pumping truck rolled to a stop by me, right in the middle of the street! The driver waved me over, I handed up my clipboard, and he signed. There's nothing like a good issue to rile up a Western North Carolinian.

This Council will have to conserve and teach conservation, and I have conservation experience. About 30 years ago, I bought the first moped in my town and rode it back and forth to work – seven miles each way. I saved gas, but I became an expert in fixing flat tires caused by discarded bottles along the side of the road. So I was appointed to a county commission that looked into a bottle bill for the county: a bottle deposit which would give used bottles value and help get them re-used (best) or recycled (better) rather than thrown away (not so good). My membership on the politically-correctly balanced commission was very frustrating but a good learning experience.

For more of my thoughts on conservation, see [http://www.mountainx.com/opinion/2007/071608the\\_other\\_side\\_of\\_the\\_mountain/](http://www.mountainx.com/opinion/2007/071608the_other_side_of_the_mountain/), a column I wrote for the Mountain Xpress in 2007.

### **2. Where do you fall on the conservative-liberal spectrum in terms of fiscal and social policy? To quote a good friend -- "not conservative enough!"**

I am fundamentally a fiscal conservative, for I really do believe in maintaining the smallest Government that can perform the essential tasks of each Governmental unit. However, I support public transportation in almost all its forms, including understanding why our big neighbor to the east, Charlotte, embarked on a light-rail project. At some point, we must think far into the future and realize that we cannot pave over the entire county!

I am a social conservative, and I am a Christian who understands and believes that we really must give a hand up, but not a handout, to our less-fortunate citizens. I am a trained observer of cause and effect, so I question fundamentally whether a housing-first approach to housing the homeless will indeed be the best use of taxpayer dollars (our dollars, surrendered to the City). As a resident who lives a block from Pritchard Park, I observe the "Whack-A-Mole" effect of establishing a Ranger and police presence in the park, which pushes the ne'er-do-wells a block or two farther away and flushes their crime, panhandling, fights, and filth out into the wider community. A better approach, I suggest, is to conceive and implement a plan to meet the needs of the homeless, the sick, the mentally handicapped, the tired, the old, all of them – but there is no reason in my mind to furnish all these services in and around our prime City real estate.

For more of my thoughts on our Pritchard Park citizens, see <http://www.mountainx.com/opinion/2005/0511keller.php>, a column I wrote for the Mountain Xpress in 2005.

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**3. In your eyes, what should be the top 2 or 3 priorities our City Council should be focused on in the upcoming year and why?**

A. I would emphasize efforts to keep the CBD cleaner, much cleaner. I learned recently that police in Charlotte may ticket those who toss cigarette butts or other litter from their cars. The fine is \$371 if convicted of intentional littering. I interact with many tourists, and they find the downtown sidewalk trash, butts, and graffiti quite off-putting.

For more of my thoughts regarding the scourge of cigarette butts, see <http://www.mountainx.com/opinion/2005/0629keller.php>, which I wrote for the Mountain Xpress in 2005.

B. We must have a water agreement. We are being held to rules for water distribution rates and charges that are different from the rules for every other North Carolina municipality. We City taxpayers are paying for both sides of this argument. It must stop. We must have an agreement.

**4. What do you consider the most crucial problem, need, or cause for the citizens of Asheville? How would you approach its resolution or champion the cause?**

We must make it easier for entrepreneurs to establish small businesses in Asheville, especially downtown. In my position as President of the Association of our building, I have found our permit-related interactions with the City to be uniformly and consistently negative, complex, and frustrating. If some one of the "sign police" were assigned to be a "sign facilitator," for example, life would be improved. If all the permits for an activity or particular construction were handled through one single city employee point-of-contact, the "just one more permit" slow-downs could be reduced dramatically. If there were a designated, empowered alternate for each decision-making employee, the slow-downs which occur on 3-, 4-, or 5-day weekends observed by key employees would not have such a dramatic, negative effect.

**5. 2008-09 and 2009-10 fiscal years will be financially tough for the City. What will be your top funding priorities and what would you like to see reduced to balance the budget?**

My top priority is public safety. Recall the phrase "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." There can be no liberty nor happiness if there is no life.

Spending reductions are difficult, but not impossible. A pair of approaches can conquer the challenge. First, short term, institute a policy of "don't spend money." That's short-hand for "spend a little less than your income." My lovely wife and I have done that from time to time during our years together, especially during the first few years of graduate school and then later, during the time we had two children in college at the same time. We postponed all optional spending for a while, and watched our checking account balance slowly improve. Maintenance of property is not optional, by the way. Defining "optional" in a large organization requires strong leaders.

Two approaches will be especially important and difficult in 2009-2010. The first is to implement zero-based budgeting as soon as possible, and the second consists of analyzing the budget to determine which departments are growing at the fastest rate and why. Public safety is growing, and I can understand that and support it. Recreation is growing rapidly, and I suspect its rate of growth could be reduced. Providing places to walk, swim, climb, run, bike, listen to concerts, golf (with balls or discs) et al. makes sense to me. Providing recreational instruction is not as important. In 2009-2010, some departments are going to have to shrink, not just grow more slowly. The provisions of the Parks,

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Recreation, and Cultural Master Plan should be put on hold until the City has additional revenue in hand.

For more of my thoughts about Recreation, in particular the Asheville Civic Center and its contribution to the City of Asheville, its contribution to our quality of life and its attraction of tourists from far and wide, see <http://www.mountainx.com/opinion/2007/121207keller/>, a column I wrote for the Mountain Xpress in 2007.

A second area of City Government which needs to be examined carefully is Community Development. I believe it is vital for the City to encourage the development of sufficient workforce housing, for example, but I suggest that the goal should be met by policies and rules of encouragement, rather than by the outright transfer of wealth. Affordable housing right in the CBD is a very difficult, if not impossible, challenge. Affordable housing out in the County, with rapid bus connection to the City, makes more sense.

I worked for years in a large bureaucracy and managed a yearly budget of hundreds of thousands of dollars. One way to try to dodge budget reduction was to offer up for reduction one's most important task, so the cost cutters would go to an associate's department and cut costs there. Our funding was cut each year, not just our budget. I had to find other funding sources for more and more of the workers in my department. So I know from experience that reducing the size of a department is really painful. Even reducing the planned growth of a department, after the department declares that it has pruned its budget to the quick, will require a consistent and steady hand.