

Curtis Fentress Candidate Questionnaire

● **What is your background in politics? If you are an incumbent, please state which offices you have held and when.**

Curtis Fentress is a 39-year-old father of three, public school parent, and business professional running to bring a new generation of leadership to the Forsyth County Board of County Commissioners.

After graduating from Mt. Tabor High School in 2003, Curtis attended Haverford College where he was Student Body Treasurer and graduated with a B.A. in Philosophy in 2007. Subsequently, Fentress was employed by a major U.S. Presidential Campaign and the leisure tourism marketing agency Visit Philly® before he received his M.B.A. in Entrepreneurship from UNC-Chapel Hill's Kenan-Flagler Business School. Since 2012, Curtis has held a series of management roles at a global sustainability leader with \$15B in annual sales where he currently serves as Director of Marketing – New Category Growth.

Curtis is a startup mentor with Winston Starts, a volunteer coach with NC Fusion, a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church and serves on the Alumni Council at UNC Kenan-Flagler.

● **Why were you drawn to run for office?**

I am running for County Commissioner because we need a new generation of leadership to help our community thrive long into the future.

We need a strong, safe public school system that serves as a foundation for success for all our kids. Going back to Governor Hunt's tenure in the 1990s, North Carolina has historically been a leader in public education. In recent history, the N.C. State Legislature has worked to advance private schooling at the expense of public schools. We need leaders at the local level who will advocate for change, so that we can continue to have strong, public schooling for all. I am proud to have been endorsed by the Forsyth County Association of Educators to support our kids and families on the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners.

We need to address the housing affordability crisis in Forsyth County that's an impediment to economic growth. We need County action to encourage more housing stock: high-density and

multi-family zoning, reducing the administrative impediments to construction, and welcoming major home builders who have exhausted projects in neighboring high-growth markets.

We need a comprehensive plan to attract new residents to Forsyth County. Forsyth County has long been focused on business recruitment. We need a stronger focus on marketing Forsyth County as a destination of choice for professionals and their families. In the modern information

economy, Forsyth County is well-positioned to attract new residents with location-flexible lifestyles that want a high quality of life with a comparatively low cost of living.

With these areas of focus, we can create a positive feedback loop broadening the tax base and generating more capacity for investment in our public schools, public safety, and emergency services.

● If you had to pick three issues (housing, economy, schools, policing, etc) which three issues would you say are most important to you?

School quality and economic growth are the most important issues facing the County Commissioners. All issues flow back to economic growth which drives the County's capacity to invest in all areas of the budget. The #1 area of increased investment for the County is, was, and will be the WS/FCS.

In office, I look forward to working in concert with the many stakeholders who make our County great. The public servants who educate our kids couldn't be higher on my list.

I am proud to have been endorsed by the Forsyth County Association of Educators to support our kids and families on the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners.

● If elected, how would you work with fellow representatives on the other side of the political aisle?

I view the office of County Commissioner as non-partisan and will build consensus with members of all political parties. Party affiliation is not a central part of my identity, nor do I believe it is for the vast majority of people.

● What do you see as the role of the office you seek?

Beyond the statutory responsibilities of the office, public figures serve as examples.

The best indication of whether someone will keep the public trust is how trustworthy that person is in other areas of their life.

I'm grateful to my wife of 11 years who vouches for me. I'm grateful to my kids, aged 7, 5, and 3 who motivate me. I'm grateful to my many friends across Forsyth County who support me – Republicans, Independents and Democrats alike. I'm grateful to my employer who has allowed me to serve my community in this office, if elected.

I humbly ask for your vote and promise to be a good steward of the public trust.

● Which city do you live in and what are three favorite things about it?

I grew up in Winston-Salem. Forsyth County was a great place to be a kid and it's a great place to be a dad of three and husband. We are blessed with so many cultural, educational, and recreational assets that are too numerous to count. I love the proximity to my family, running around my neighborhood, and the weather which is an underrated benefit of living in this great state.

To capitalize on the great raw material this community has, the County needs a more focused effort to attract new residents and fuel investment in our future.

● What things does the county need to work on, and how would you contribute to those efforts?

Forsyth County's FY24-25 budget is \$584M, a 2.5% increase from the previous fiscal year enumerated over 397 pages.

The County is mandated to provide essential government services including, but not limited to, the following: Courts, Sheriff, public school buildings, voting administration, youth detention centers, and certain public health services. NC State law also permits, and most Counties elect, to fund other government services such as animal services, libraries, EMS, fire protection, waste collection and disposal, parks and recreation, mental health services, and community colleges. There is a wide array of government services and facilities that most citizens are unaware are supported by Forsyth County.

The first aspect of the budgeting process that I would change is the regular meeting time for the Board of Commissioners. I support changing the Board meeting times from 2PM every week. Doing so, will enable the Board to invite a broader swath of citizens into the process, and understand the priorities of citizens better.

82% of the County budget goes to a combination of education (WS/FCS primarily), public safety (sheriff, emergency services), health and human services (animal control, youth services, social services, etc), and debt service which is the current interest payments on past bond issuances. While I will seek to find efficiencies in these larger areas of the budget, all of these areas need more investment.

Together, we need to increase revenues for the County to be able to fund critical services such as those listed above. Increasing revenues are a function of how many taxpayers exist, how much they spend, and what rate they pay. As County Commissioner, my focus would be on increasing the number of taxpayers as opposed to raising rates which could have a counterproductive effect on the budget long-term.

• What areas do you think the county spends too much money on? What areas should they be spending less?

For many decades, the County Commission has used tax incentives to attract business relocation. I am opposed to the use of tax incentives as a tool to attract businesses. I see no evidence such tools are effective and only serve to divert resources away from critical areas of need such as our schools. The last publicly traded corporate headquarters relocation to the Forsyth County area was BB&T in 1995, which has since left. Gone are the days where we can compete for the HQs of publicly traded companies.

Now, in the modern economy, we need to be focused on attracting knowledge workers who can choose where to live and work remotely. Working to attract these types of residents will increase revenues from the county and provide for investment in services across the board.

Commissioner Whisenhunt has been in this office since 1996. Commissioner Linville has been in this office since 1980. Both have been in the majority for many decades. I respect the incumbent's dedication to public service and submit to the voters of Forsyth County that it is time for a change.

- Earlier this year, the Supreme Court passed a ruling that allows for municipalities to fine or ban unhoused people for being in public spaces. What relationship should the county commission have with the county's homeless community?

The County serves a critical role in connecting anyone who needs social services with the government and non-profit entities that deliver those services. We, as leaders, should seek to lift up the neediest in our community. That's the true measure of a civilized society.

- Do you support tax increases to support school infrastructure or teacher pay?

I support teacher pay and infrastructure as high priorities in the County's next budget. I believe we can raise revenues through seeking out additional revenue sources over the short and long term.

To increase revenues for the County over the long term, we need to have sustained effort to increase the migration of net payers to Forsyth County to grow County revenues. Since the 2020 census, the Charlotte Metro Area has increased in population by 5%, the Raleigh-Cary Metro Area by 7%, and the Winston-Salem Metro Area by 3%. Forsyth County has a much smaller population than the Triangle and Charlotte, a lower cost of living, and should be able to grow by a faster rate than those other areas with whom we are in competition for residents.

To increase revenues for the County in the short term, I believe the County should challenge the non-profit status of Novant Health and Atrium Health, who are the owners of the highest value property in the County and pay little in property tax. Classifying the major healthcare systems as business entities for property tax purposes would generate tens of millions of dollars in incremental property tax revenues per year for County services.

- Do you have any personal or professional relationships that would be a conflict of interest? How would you navigate them as a county commissioner?

No