

VOTER GUIDE

2026 Voter Guide: Roanoke City Council

Seven candidates are vying for three seats on the Roanoke City Council in the November elections.

The field includes one incumbent, Council Member Vivian Sanchez-Jones, two former-elected officials, David Bowers and Stephanie Moon Reynolds, and four newcomers: Raekwon Moore, Kathy Cohen, Danny Clawson and Amanda Marko.

Marko is the sole Republican on the ticket; Moore, Clawson and Sanchez-Jones won the August Democratic primary and Bowers, Moon Reynolds and Cohen are running as independents.

Below is information provided by the candidates about themselves and their platforms.

Danny Clawson



Age: 40

Family: Spouse: Lauren Canary, MD - Carilion Family Med, proud parents of two rescue dogs and two rescue bunnies

Job: Executive Director, Virginia Harm Reduction Coalition

Party affiliation: Democrat

Prior elected office: None.

Other public service: Youth Development Program, Peace Corps Cameroon (2012-2014). Community Liaison Council, Center for AIDS Research at Emory University (2016-2021). State Outreach Manager, Georgia Equality (2018-2021) (Non-partisan Voter Registration and Voter Protection, Medicaid Expansion Advocacy, HIV De-criminalization)

Education: B.S. in Sociology, Brigham Young University (2010), Master of Public Health, Emory University (2017)

Q&A: What are the top issues you are running on?

Education: We need a stable funding formula that allows school administrators to properly plan for the thousands of workers and students that rely on them each year. We need collective bargaining to retain quality staff and ensure that school resources are being utilized in the most effective way. I plan to apply the maximum sales tax on recreational cannabis to fully fund school services and fill funding gaps.

Housing: I have been working on Roanoke's housing crisis for five years — advocating at city council, collaborating with social service providers, and learning from contractors. I currently serve the most unstable members of our unhoused community, giving me a deep understanding of the complex barriers to getting people off the street. I will work with Del. (Sam) Rasoul to pass legislation requiring new high-density housing to include deeply affordable units (\$450-\$650/month). I will propose deferred property taxes for households making less than \$55,000/yr, and coordinate existing resources to improve mental health care services to help newly housed people retain their housing.

Transparency: As the Director of a \$2M nonprofit that is exclusively grant funded, I will bring strong financial oversight and leverage my deep experience in fiscal and programmatic compliance to ensure we are spending public funds wisely.

What would you do to address the city's budget woes?

Roanoke needs to increase our tax base by attracting mid-career professionals with our relatively low cost of living, access to the outdoors, and cultural diversity. We need to increase rail connectivity to nearby cities such as Washington, D.C. and Richmond to facilitate in-office days for remote workers based in Roanoke and improve public transportation to attract eco-conscious and non-driver residents. We need to collaborate with our regional partners to invest in eco-tourism, including improved public access to trails and supporting outdoor recreation industries in our rivers and forests. I also want to continue building the city's national sporting events portfolio. We need to work with our regional partners to attract recreational spending by bringing back the Blue Ridge Ironman and more partners like USA Cycling. Lastly, we need to partner with Virginia Tech to develop growing technology sectors such as renewable energy research and manufacturing as well as vertical farming (CEA) to ensure that we are prepared for and capitalizing on the economic changes driven by climate change. In the short term, we need to maximize recreational cannabis taxes, institute a land value tax, invest in workforce housing, and leverage diverse grant funding to fill in the gaps.

Why should people vote for you?

Roanokers should vote for me because I have spent my 20-year career in public health and social services working in low-resource settings. I know what it takes to get things done. From providing nonprofit addiction services during the first wave of the opioid crisis in 2010, directing teacher training and community education projects in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2014, or stopping Medicaid work requirements with a Republican super-majority in Georgia in 2019, I am highly skilled in getting results and winning uphill battles. As a worker who has had a job since I was 13 years old, I understand the challenges facing average residents in our city and what people need to survive. I am an expert in working with diverse stakeholders towards common objectives — regardless of ideological alignment — and will never let political theater get in the way of delivering for our community. I am committed to advocating for strategic, sustainable development and resisting short-sited economic solutions like data centers. I am committed to protecting our undocumented and unhoused neighbors from federal persecution, freeing our communities from unconstitutional surveillance, and developing good jobs with liveable wages and strong benefits for our workers. I am a fighter and I commit to fighting for this community and our future.

Raekwon Moore



Age: 31

Family: Three siblings. A twin and two other siblings who are also twins.

Job: Electronic Health Records Specialist at Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare

Party affiliation: Democrat

Prior elected office: None.

Other public service: Officer of Elections for 11 years

Q&A: What are the top issues you are running on?

The top issues I'm running on are public schools, public parks, and public transportation. I believe in fully funding our public schools through bringing back "Eat for Education" and appropriating a portion of our meals tax towards public schools. I also believe every park in this

city should be developed so that every family in this city has a free and adequate space to be a family. I also believe that public transit and our public transit workers are essential to supporting working people in this city. Every bus stop should have a covering, every bus route should be efficient, and every transit worker should be supported.

What would you do to address the city's budget woes?

Roanoke has a revenue problem that can be solved by bringing more businesses and visitors to our city. You cannot bring businesses if you cannot obtain a permit. I would work to fully staff our permitting department so that we can become the quickest locality in our region to open a business. I believe in not only reassessing the requirements for each of our city positions, but also strengthening our high school and college to city employment pipeline in order to resolve the issue of vacancies long-term.

Why should people vote for you?

I was born and raised in Roanoke and I have a track record of service to this community. I have been a volunteer with 4-H since I was a teenager and am now also a mentor with the Young Doctors Project. I currently serve on the Executive Committee for the Grandin Theatre Foundation as well as the Community Impact Committee for the United Way; and starting at the age of 19 I served as an officer of election for Roanoke City and continued to do so for 11 years. I am proud to say that not only am I from this city, but that I am of this city, and I'm running to move this city forward in a way that includes all of us.

Vivian Sanchez-Jones



Age: 66

Family: Husband and 2 children

Job: Student Support Specialist- Roanoke City Public Schools

Party affiliation: Democrat

Prior elected office: Currently serving first term as an elected City Councilmember

Other Public Service: Founder of Avancemos Roanoke. I have served three four-year terms on the Virginia Board of Counseling, appointed by Governors Tim Kaine, Terry McAuliffe, and Ralph Northam. I also served on the Virginia Latino Advisory Board, appointed by Governors Terry McAuliffe and Ralph Northam. In addition, I have served on the Diversity Board for the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, the Carilion Children's Hospital Board, and numerous community boards.

Education: Bachelor of Business Administration, Baruch College, City University of New York (CUNY)

Q&A: What are the top issues you are running on?

My priorities are public safety, strong neighborhoods, economic opportunity, and responsible government. I want Roanoke to be a city where people feel safe, where families can find affordable housing, where small businesses can grow, and where every neighborhood has an opportunity to thrive.

Public safety requires more than just more officers. We need to build stronger relationships in the community, foster youth engagement, expand mental health resources, and continue supporting our first responders.

I also want to continue working on housing, economic development, transportation, and neighborhood investment. Roanoke needs to attract new businesses and investment while supporting the businesses and residents who are already here.

What would you do to address the city's budget woes?

We need to be responsible with taxpayer dollars while also growing our city's revenue. That means carefully reviewing spending, prioritizing essential services, and making sure our investments provide value to residents.

We need to continue growing our tax base through economic development, supporting small businesses, attracting new investment, creating housing, and bringing more people and businesses into our community.

We should also continue pursuing state and federal funding and partnerships that can help us address community needs without placing the entire burden on local taxpayers.

Why should people vote for you?

I believe voters should consider my experience, my record of service, and my commitment to Roanoke. I have served on City Council since 2020, first being appointed to fill an unexpired term and then being elected by voters.

Before serving on Council, I spent years working with immigrant and refugee families and advocating for people in our community. I founded Avancemos Roanoke and have served on boards and committees focused on strengthening our community. My work has always been about helping people and making sure their voices are heard.

I am not running for recognition. I am running because I believe in Roanoke and believe we can continue moving our city forward.

I will continue listening to residents, working across differences, asking difficult questions, and focusing on practical solutions that make a difference in people's everyday lives.

Amanda Marko



Age: 49

Family: Husband, Nick

Job: Owner, Connected Strategy Group

Party affiliation: Republican

Prior elected office: None.

Other public service: Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority, Roanoke Regional Airport Commission, Mill Mountain Advisory Board, eight years as a United States Naval Reserve public affairs officer.

Education: Bachelor of Science in Journalism from Ohio University; Masters in National Security from the Naval War College

Q&A: What are the top issues you are running on?

Roanoke is thinking too small. We have real assets including a growing medical and life sciences sector, a diverse manufacturing base, a beautiful downtown, outdoor recreation that draws visitors from across the country, and a regional airport that connects us to the world. These

should be advantages. Instead they keep translating into missed opportunity. Our city's finances are stretched, our schools and public safety are strained, and everyone I talk to is frustrated.

I am running on four things. First, economic development with a real strategy — targeting high-wage industries like advanced manufacturing, life sciences, and logistics that align with what Roanoke already does well. Second, fiscal transparency and honest books instead of government math that papers over long-term liabilities. Third, schools funded by a thriving economy, not a strained one, because you cannot separate the fate of our city from the fate of our children. Fourth, neighborhoods and a downtown that belongs to everyone, including safety without compromising our rights with always-on cameras, vitality where we already have infrastructure, and a regional approach to homelessness that stops leaving Roanoke to solve a regional problem alone.

What would you do to address the city's budget woes?

The city has been using what I call government math to make the budget look balanced. First, pushing capital improvement projects further down the road. Second, moving school reserves back onto city books. And third, leaving critical positions unfilled. The result is deteriorating infrastructure, schools that have lost flexibility to spend where children need it most, and staffing shortages in critical positions.

The fix is not raising our property tax rates, which are already among the highest in Virginia among our peer cities. We cannot keep asking homeowners and renters — who absorb the rent increases — to compensate for economic development we have not achieved.

The real fix is growing the tax base. That means cutting permitting delays that are costing us revenue right now — a business waiting months for a permit is not hiring and is not paying taxes. It means putting vacant commercial and industrial properties, especially those owned by the City itself, back into productive use. And it means prioritizing ruthlessly. Not every program delivers equal value. I will ask hard questions to find savings and efficiencies.

Why should people vote for you?

Vote for me if you believe city council is missing key skill sets: business sense, common sense, and the courage to act. I am a small business owner with a career at the intersection of economic development and marketing, including experience with the U.S. Senate, the nation's largest chamber of commerce, and global companies. That work has meant one thing: helping communities attract investment, create jobs, and build a stronger future. My hands-on volunteer work includes teaching financial literacy through Junior Achievement and mentoring under-resourced women through House of Bread.

Through my professional experiences and community involvement, I fully understand Roanoke assets, frustrations, and potential. And I know what it takes to create prosperity in a community.

My commitment is simple: work with anyone — any party, any colleague, any community — who wants to move this city forward. And I will put in the work until we feel the results.

Roanoke is not a small city with small potential. It is a city stuck with small-thinking leadership. The Roanoke of our dreams is possible, but it requires a leader with vision.

Kathy Cohen



Age: 64

Family: Three children, one grandchild

Job: Retired Rabbi from Temple Emanuel

Party affiliation: Independent

Prior elected office: None

Other public service: Chair, city of Roanoke Gun Violence Prevention Commission; former Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board member; past-president, Family Promise Board, current United Way Board member; founder, JPC Preschool; past-chair, Roanoke Valley Ministerial Conference; past RAM House board member; downtown Kiwanis Club member.

Education: Valedictorian, Boca Raton Community High school, B.A. in Near Eastern Studies from Brandeis University, masters and Doctor of Divinity degree and ordination from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute for Religion.

Q&A: What are the top issues you are running on?

I hope to restore as much funding as possible to our schools, ensure appropriate funding for our police, fire and emergency services and concentrate on much needed economic growth in order to ensure a bright future for our city. We need to turn the thousands of blighted/dilapidated homes in our city into new, truly affordable housing. The rezoning amendment is unlikely to create affordable units.

What would you do to address the city's budget woes?

The city's budget woes are perplexing because the budget is incredibly difficult to decipher. The city's assets (in terms of property and building ownership) are missing and many figures are only presented as an aggregate total. The budget does not reflect what items are covered by grants or any of the restrictions that the grant money has. My first approach would be to get real data on all budget lines, to understand if we have assets that are unnecessary and to maintain very strict spending controls. We need "new" money to add to the budget. Some have suggesting diverting the meals tax or instituting a land value tax (which would certainly be revenue neutral and simply shift tax burden) but neither brings us new money. Higher residency rates would be great but that is a long-term solution. The hard truth is that there is no magic, immediate solution. Working to bring new companies to the area and enhancing mutually beneficial public/private partnerships is our best path forward.

Why should people vote for you?

I ask for your vote because I have a proven history of leadership and fiscal responsibility. I understand the landscape in which we find ourselves today and have a plan to move forward. I am a collaborative voice who believes strongly in civility in politics. I will be a Council member for all of our citizens, regardless of political leanings. I believe in Roanoke's bright future, and I am willing to spend the time it takes to get us there.

Stephanie Moon Reynolds



Age: 68

Family: Married to Earl Reynolds, Jr.; blended family of four adult children

Job: Retired Roanoke City Clerk

Party affiliation: Independent

Prior elected office: Roanoke City Council Member, 2020–2024

Other public service: Vice Chair, The Salvation Army Roanoke Valley Advisory Board; Secretary, Project Discovery of Virginia, Inc.; board service with Apple Ridge Farm and Family Service of Roanoke Valley.

Education: 1976 honor graduate, William Fleming High School; cum laude graduate, Virginia Western Community College.

Q&A: What are the top issues you are running on?

My priorities are accountability and transparency, neighborhood investment, economic growth, and fiscal responsibility. Government exists to earn the public's trust and create opportunities for every resident to succeed.

That means listening to residents and recognizing that every neighborhood is unique, with its own needs, challenges, and opportunities. We must work together to strengthen our neighborhoods, attract new businesses, and support existing ones to help generate sustainable revenue.

Throughout my career, I have learned that the best solutions are built through listening, partnership, and accountability.

My vision is to build a Roanoke where government earns and sustains the public's trust and creates opportunities for every neighborhood to thrive.

What would you do to address the city's budget woes?

Roanoke faces both revenue and spending challenges. We must give thought to how taxpayer dollars are spent, establish priorities, and determine where changes should be made.

At the same time, we must focus on generating sustainable revenue through regionalism, partnerships, and opportunities for economic growth. We should also look for opportunities to breathe new life into vacant buildings and underutilized properties so they become assets that strengthen our economy and improve our quality of life.

Addressing our budget challenges will require fiscal responsibility, economic growth, collaboration, transparency, and a willingness to make difficult decisions.

Why should people vote for you?

Roanoke isn't simply where I live—it is home. This city has shaped my life, my family, my career, and my commitment to public service.

For 42 years, I served the City of Roanoke, beginning my career in the City Clerk's Office and ultimately serving 13 years as City Clerk before earning the privilege of serving four years on

City Council. I continue to give back through service on nonprofit boards and as a substitute teacher in Roanoke City Public Schools.

Experience has taught me that good government isn't about politics. It's about listening, collaborative problem-solving, and being truthful even in the face of public criticism.

If given the privilege to serve again, I will bring knowledge, experience, accountability, collaboration, and transparency, with a commitment to serving this City with integrity.

I would be honored to earn your support.

David Bowers



Age: 74

Family: Married to Margarita Cubas with six grown stepchildren and 12 step grandchildren.

Job: Attorney at Law since 1978 (48 years), Adjunct Professor-US Government Virginia, Western Community College (10 years)

Party affiliation: Independent

Prior elected office: Eight years as a Roanoke City Council member, Four-terms serving as Roanoke mayor.

Other public service: Member Roanoke Kiwanis Club, Knights of Columbus, and Ancient Order of Hibernians, Volunteer at RAM House and Sister City supporter, organized one of the first Earth Day celebrations in Virginia in 1970

Education: Patrick Henry High School/Roanoke-Student Government President 1970, Belmont Abbey College/Belmont, NC, BA-English, 1974, Loyola University Law School, New Orleans, JD, 1978, Hollins University, MALS Master Degree, 2004

Q&A: What top issues are you running on?

My top three issues are ending nondisclosure agreements, particularly with the proposed casino, and opposing the dissolution of the Hotel Roanoke Commission and sale of the hotel, repealing the new zoning ordinance and reinstating the prior ordinance, once again reassuring procedural due process rights for residents, and taking an austerity approach to the city budget and reinstating the former 40% school/city budget formula.

What would you do to address the city's budget woes?

The city government's budget is in crisis. It has not been handled well. I'm very concerned about it because I know I left the mayor's office, I left the city in good financial shape. So I'm concerned about the management, but ultimately the the persons that are responsible are the city council, and I don't think they've done a very good job of managing the budget over the last several years.

One of the best examples would be they had to cut \$16 million from the school budget, and that formula had been a very successful formula for 10 years or more. And they had to cut \$16 million dollars out of schools. That should be one of the top issues, that and public safety. Schools of public safety should always be the priority for any municipal local government. And number two, what have they done about the civic center over the last 10 years? It's now in need of \$30 million of maintenance and equipment replacement and improvement, it's just neglect. It's been a neglect of the sound conservative financial position that the city has always run on, on under every mayor and city council for the last 40 and 50 years.

Why should people vote for you?

I've spent my life, ever since I served as SGA President at PH in 1970 , working "with" and "for" the people of Roanoke, including 8 years as a City Councilman, and 4-term Mayor of Roanoke for 16 years (which was truly a blessing in my life). We have fine candidates this year for City Council, and I'm glad that three of us are independents. I know the people of Roanoke appreciate my experience and long years of public service, and I hope they know that I'll continue fighting for them.

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