

there are many perspectives and a lot of passion to harness for good.”

— **Vic Isley**,  
CEO of Explore Asheville and  
president of BCTDA

“Free education! If we want a stronger and more competent workforce, we should be focusing on making higher education free for all people, so that we as a people can be better in the long run.”

— **Xero Koffsky**,  
junior at Warren Wilson College

“A commitment to workers and families. Our service workers are the lifeblood of our economy. I hope we can bring the full portfolio of resources to the table to fully fund our schools, early childhood development and deeply affordable housing initiatives. We have prioritized other areas and allowed folks to be unhoused, food insecure and cost burdened for housing, and we’ve significantly shorted our educators and schools. We can do better.”

— **Ben Williamson**,  
nonprofit administrator

“More housing of every type. Ideally, for those at lower income levels, of course. And especially in urban areas closer to jobs and daily needs, where families can do without a car for every adult. But we should be honest about the subsidies, the support services and the political angst the commitment requires and stop pretending we can close housing supply-demand gaps by arm-twisting developers to do what the market cannot come close to providing.”

— **Ben Brown**,  
retired partner in urban planning firm

“Asheville’s top priority should be zoning reform to allow more ‘missing middle’ housing [townhouses, duplexes, triplexes, garden apartments, etc.].

This one measure would simultaneously combat climate change, encourage cheaper housing, help repair a legacy of segregation and enhance livability in a city overly dependent on automobile exhaust. Its defeat, on the other hand, would force locals to confront their pinched-face hypocrisy in the mirror and admit they really aren’t progressives after all. It’s win-win.”

— **Peter Robbins**,  
retired lawyer, Marshall area

“I have the opportunity to work with a lot of young people every day, and I think that they should be our community’s top priority in 2024. We should be addressing substance and violence prevention, youth mental health, substance misuse, workforce development and education in more impactful ways. Our children are the future, and they should be involved in the planning and preparation of that future.”

— **Michael Hayes**,  
executive director of Umoja Health,  
Wellness and Justice Collective

#### What from this year gives you hope for WNC in 2024?

“I am excited about the energy and interest that is sparking around WNC agribusiness, ag-tech and resilient local agriculture and food systems. In November, I attended the Western NC AgTech and Agribusiness Discovery Event with leaders from across our region to discuss opportunities for growing agribusiness to have positive multigenerational economic impacts across WNC. Now is the time for us to work collaboratively to ensure we have robust and resilient agriculture and food systems.”

— **Terri Wells**,  
Buncombe County commissioner

“I love where we live — the rivers, forests, mountains and people. How lucky are we to call this little pocket of the universe our home? I am hopeful every time I step outside my front door. Young people and their passion give me hope. Also, the great nonprofits we have here and the support they receive from our community gives me hope.”

— **Joe Fishleigh**,  
executive coach

“This year I connected with an amazing community of Black and brown people in WNC who enjoy the outdoors. Not only do they enjoy it, they are creating opportunities to help others feel a sense of belonging. Plus, the outdoor industry is ready to better understand the need for inclusivity. With WNC being the epicenter of outdoor recreation in the East, 2024 feels like an important moment in time for #representationmatters in the outdoors.”

— **Simone Adams**,  
executive director,  
Color My Outdoors

“I have seen the county and city really listening to the community and coming up with multiple innovative ideas to help manage concerns voiced by community members, i.e., BCSO Co-Responder program and Asheville Fire Department Community Responder Team, etc. These programs and more in development give me hope for positive changes to individuals in need in our community and, therefore, our community at large.”

— **Sherrie Pace**,  
licensed social worker and  
addictions specialist

“Since launching ‘The Overlook with Matt Peiken’ podcast, I’ve learned so much more about what and who make this city tick. In particular, I’m awed by the people doing the day-to-day work of


Asheville’s smaller social service nonprofits. It will largely be through their work if our city makes headway with some of our more intractable issues.”

— **Matt Peiken**,  
host,  
“The Overlook with Matt Peiken”

“Despite the financial- and heart-crushing burglary we were forced to stomach in February 2023, we have learned a lot about boundaries for [our] ‘Nerd Sanctuary’ Morgan’s Comics to make our haven a more safe, nearby, inexpensive, fun and educational place for locals and visitors to enjoy their day. This will be the first year since the ‘bleak vortex’ of 2020 that we have not had to take out a business loan, which lends to our hope that we will continue to grow in a positive direction as the new pastel and neon buds begin to appear all over our beloved Blue Ridge Mountains again this spring 2024.”

— **Morgan Albritton**,  
owner, Morgan’s Comics

“In 2019, during my run for office, one of my top concerns was the disconnect and the divide within the community and organizations. I have noticed a community that is synchronizing, collaborating and working together to address many of the city’s major challenges, such as public safety, homelessness and affordable housing. The improved communication and collaboration between the City of Asheville and Buncombe County to eliminate and reduce cost and achieve similar goals is promising. The awareness of the need to work as a team gives me hope moving forward.”

— **Sandra Kilgore**,  
Asheville vice mayor 



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JOE FISHLEIGH



MICHAEL HAYES



BROOKE HEATON



STU HELM



VIC ISLEY



SANDRA KILGORE



XERO KOFFSKY



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PETER ROBBINS



KARIS ROBERTS



TERRY ROBERTS



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