

## **Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans Cultural Policy Candidate Questionnaire**

These questions were developed in conjunction with a number of musicians, artists, grassroots cultural organizations, and culture bearers. The same set of questions is being sent to all mayoral and city council candidates (with one question for mayoral candidates only). We will be publishing the complete answers on our website and expect coverage from a number of news organizations.

If you have any questions, please contact Ethan Ellestad, Executive Director of the Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans at [director@maccno.com](mailto:director@maccno.com) or at 504-327-7713. We would also be happy to set up a meeting to further discuss these issues if you would like.

Please return your responses to these questions before September 28<sup>th</sup>. If you would like, you can type your responses directly on this document.

[E-mail your responses to director@maccno.com](mailto:director@maccno.com)

Thank you for your cooperation and your willingness to serve New Orleans and its residents! We know the culture of the city is very important to many voters, and we want to ensure that people have all the information they need to make their decision.

**Candidate Name: Desiree Charbonnet**

**1. How do you define the term “culture bearer”? What criteria do you use to determine to whom the term applies?**

A culture bearer is a person steeped in a craft with a tradition, but who brings that tradition forward creatively. Culture bearers are important to New Orleans because they represent the very fabric of our city.

**2. New Orleans culture comes from its neighborhoods, working class African-American neighborhoods in particular. However, these neighborhoods, such as Central City, the Treme, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward, are facing skyrocketing housing costs, widespread displacement, and rapid gentrification. How will you ensure that housing will remain affordable for working-class communities in these neighborhoods and that long term residents will not be forced to move due to short-term rentals or escalating mortgages and rent?**

As Mayor, my administration would emphasize facilitating musicians housing. The development of affordable housing in New Orleans, especially for our working people, has not kept pace with the growing demand. My administration will approach this problem aggressively by prioritizing the development of safe, healthy and affordable

rental units and homeownership near jobs and essential public services.

We are losing our natural musicians village with fewer and fewer musicians living in Treme, the birthplace of Jazz. It is apparent that this city is in an affordable housing crisis, this crisis hits our cultural economy the hardest. I have put together a detailed plan to address the affordability crisis and made it public for everyone to view. Please visit [DesireeCharbonnet.com](http://DesireeCharbonnet.com) and send me your thoughts and ideas.

**3. Many musicians, cultural practitioners, and service industry workers travel long distances from areas like New Orleans East to get to jobs and gigs in the historic core of the City. What are your plans to make public transportation more efficient, reliable, and cost effective for these individuals?**

I am a strong advocate for public transportation, My administration will work with transportation experts and RTA to determine where our existing needs are. Right now our existing transportation system needs to be more efficient, frequent, and on time. Investing in and expanding RTA is essential.

**4. The City of New Orleans brought in \$7.4 billion in tourism revenue from 10.45 million visitors last year, many of whom were drawn here by advertising campaigns and images that rely heavily on our musicians, artists, and traditional culture bearers. Despite this financial windfall for the city, many of these same musicians, artists, and culture bearers still live close to the poverty line. How would you ensure that a greater percentage of tourism revenue finds its way to the people and communities that create the culture that attracts these visitors?**

As Mayor I am willing to take the next step to work together with musicians and stakeholders in the music industry to determine what is the best way city government can help facilitate economic growth for artists working in our cultural economy.

One way is to treat musicians as small businesses. Many musicians work not only in the music industry, but also as creative business owners, in the hospitality industry, and in many other unique jobs. The city can work to help musicians develop everything from a business plan to connecting them with other musicians can help increase revenues. As important to our city as music is, and it's essential, we must adopt "best practices" when it comes to fostering a thriving music community.

**5. There is a fundamental inequity in parade fee structures, where fees for large Mardi Gras parades are significantly less than what Social Aid and Pleasure clubs pay for their annual second lines. How will you address this inequity?**

Social Aid and Pleasure clubs are some of New Orleans's most important civic institutions. Government has to work with these clubs to make sure they are paying a fair and equitable fee for their annual second lines. Under the current fee structure, Second lines clearly pay more than their fair share of fees. My administration will work with Safety and Permits to reduce these fees, while still making sure that all safety standards are met.

**6. Do you support the current administration's \$40 million dollar Security Plan? What is one component that you would keep, and one component that you would change?**

I support the installation of security cameras in 20 crime hotspots throughout the city. New Orleans is facing an undermanned police department and crime cameras can help deter crime, make our citizens feel more secure, and help the police solve crime quickly and efficiently.

I would work with bars and business owners in the French Quarter to come up with effective ways to make sure their patrons are safe, without forcing them to close their doors at 3 am. New Orleans is known for its twenty-four hour French Quarter and unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary we should work to keep it open for business.

**7. How will you support neighborhood bars, music venues, and small cultural businesses?**

My administration will create a task force that will work as a liaison between the mayor's office and artists to propose specialized policies and hear complaints. This liaison will be from within the local music industry, and will be able to "speak the language" of local musicians and understand their points of view. The best way that government can support neighborhood venues is to hear directly from them, what their thoughts and concerns are.

**8. Do you support the permanent removal of the 8PM street musician curfew?**

We need to work together to find a middle ground when it comes to musicians working past curfew. I am willing to work with advocates and other members of the community to figure out what is the best way to balance working musicians and the needs of neighbors. We should take a common sense approach and sit musicians and stakeholders in this community down to figure out how to get everyone on the same page. Our musicians are

a valuable part of our community and my administration will reflect that in every decision.

**9. New Orleans culture includes Black Masking/Mardi Gras Indians and brass bands, but also funk and bounce music, spoken word, theater and dance, and much more. How will you partner with these diverse cultural communities in crafting impactful policies and decisions that reflect both the values of that community and our local government?**

I've focused my career on being a bridge builder, and that will not stop when I become mayor. I will work with our many diverse communities on policies that take into consideration the values of each of these groups.

**10. Cultural activity is a great crime prevention tool, particularly for youth. Provide one specific example of what you will do/advocate for to better leverage our cultural assets to build a safer community?**

Culture is not only an integral part of New Orleans, but I truly believe it is an asset for crime prevention. I would expand existing programs, e.g. those under the auspices of NORD, to partner with other nonprofit organizations like YaYa and other members of our cultural community to truly help make New Orleans safer, while providing an outlet for our children. Better integration of the public sector, nonprofits, and businesses can help reduce crime while fostering our vital New Orleans culture.

**11. Many of New Orleans' musical/cultural traditions are passed down from teacher to student and/or elder to young torchbearer. How would you assist in perpetuating our traditions for the next generation within our current school system?**

Building partnerships with NORD and our school system, will help encourage our schools to implement programs that will instruct our students in the arts, music, and culture, maintaining our rich heritage.

**12. Do you support creating priority loading/unloading zones for musicians on Frenchmen St. & Bourbon St.?**

Musicians are valuable assets and creating priority loading/unloading zones for musicians is a good idea. Once elected I will use the transition period to review important suggestions like priority loading zone with business owners and musicians to determine the most effective way to achieve the ultimate goal, to keep musicians safe and help them be on time and ready for their performances.

**13. (For Mayoral candidates only) Will you maintain the Office of Cultural Economy? If so, what is your vision for that agency under your leadership?**

Before I take office I will examine every department. Every office, public-private partnership, and recipient of public funds will be reviewed. Pending that review, my administration would work with the Mayor's Office of Cultural Economy to further develop relationships with musicians and member of the cultural economy in order to facilitate economic growth specifically for them. The Office of Cultural Economy has done a great job helping coordinate cultural events on a large scale, my administration would focus more on keeping the actual musicians in the loop.