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Durham Residents Might Receive a Guaranteed Universal Basic Income

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4-5 minutes

Durham Mayor Steve Schewel kicked off the council's work session today by announcing that the Bull City is among 30 cities across the country under consideration for a guaranteed basic income for some of its residents.

Although some local media reports state that residents would receive \$1,000 a month, Schewel told the *INDY* on Thursday that the city does not yet have a specific plan in place.

"We're looking at other cities' programs to see the best," he said.

During Thursday's work session, Schewel explained that he was a member of a national group, [Mayors for a Guaranteed Income](#), whose goal is to encourage federal legislation for a universal basic income.

The group has become increasingly active, and has now received funds from Jack Dorsey, Twitter's CEO who last month announced that he had donated \$15 million to Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, a group of about 30 cities. The funds could provide each city with up to \$500,000.

"The timeline is very short," said Schewel, who added that the potential funding will be available in March. "And while we are not guaranteed the funding, we are very high on the list of the people who are doing the funding."

The mayor asked council members [Pierce Freelon](#) and Mark-Anthony Middleton to lead the city's effort on behalf of the council. The mayor noted that "a few cities have been doing this already," including Stockton, California, where some residents receive a basic income of \$500 a month to help them manage the COVID-19 crisis.

The idea of a universal basic income gained significant national traction in recent years thanks to [presidential candidate Andrew Yang](#) (who is now running for mayor of New York City), among other supporters.

Schewel asked the two council members to review other cities' pilot programs to determine which best practices could be adapted by Durham.

"It's been one of the holiday gifts that we share with the public, and I'm glad that today we are letting folks know that this is coming," Freelon said.

Freelon said the possibility of city residents receiving a basic guaranteed income "is a really important part of a broad scope of programs to address a variety of issues that relate back to poverty, including violence."

"Every two weeks reminds us that the shooting hasn't stopped, the violence has continued," Freelon added, referring to last year's dismal plateau of more than 800 shootings and nearly 40 homicides in the city.

Freelon said that he had met with officials from Charleston, South Carolina and Richmond, Virginia, "to hear how they have deployed those resources," along with reviewing programs in Stockton and Compton, California to develop a pilot that's "still Durham, uniquely Durham."

Freelon added that he intends to meet with officials at Duke University's Samuel Dubois Cook Center for Social Equity that's headed by economic [scholar William "Sandy" Darity](#), who previously called for federal reparations for Black Americans in his latest book, [From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century](#), that he co-wrote with his partner Kirsten Mullen.

Middleton called the chance for residents to receive a guaranteed universal income, “a huge opportunity for the city that will allow leaders to focus on the root causes instead of traditional approaches” to issues like crime.

“This is precisely what a city like Durham ought to be doing,” he said. “Who better than Durham in this country? What city would you expect for something like this [other] than Durham?”

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