

**At Large Councilmember Candidate Questionnaire**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the 2022 Ward 7 Democrats Candidate Forum for candidates in the Democratic Primary for the **At-Large Councilmember**. Below is a pre-Forum questionnaire that will give you the opportunity to expand on your position and goals in depth and afford our membership the opportunity to truly understand your positions.

Please respond no later than 11:59pm on Friday, February 18, 2022. **Timely completion and submission of this questionnaire is a prerequisite to participate in the Candidate Forum.**

**Candidate Information**

Your responses will be posted on the Ward 7 Dems webpage. Please provide a headshot of the candidate.

Candidate Name: Bradley Thomas

Candidate website: www.votebradleythomas.com

Candidate Twitter: VoteBradleyT4DC
Candidate IG: bradleythomas4dc

Candidate Facebook: bradleythomas4dc

Other social media:

General Questions

1. What makes you the right selection for the Democratic nomination for At-Large Councilmember?

I believe that I’m uniquely suited to bring a fresh perspective combined with a wide range of skills and expertise to the Council. No one else in this race, and frankly no one else currently serving on the Council, has been a practicing attorney for 40 years, an electrical engineer who once helped design systems for the Navy and the Air Force, a musician, songwriter and recording artist, a local and regional church leader, the author of a thesis on environmental justice, and a community activist. Not that I’m special, but I have been richly blessed. And I understand that “to whom much is given, much is required.” My core beliefs are simple. I believe in the right of the people to be safe, healthy and heard by their representatives. I believe that a leader should act on principles that are unwavering and not for sale at any price. And I believe that progress means striving to bring equity to all our neighborhoods in terms of access to quality education, employment opportunities, affordable housing, public safety and environmental justice. I learned long ago that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. I care about this city and if you’re a District resident, long-term or brand new, I care about you and I’m ready to represent your interests on the DC Council.

1. As an At-Large Councilmember, what steps would you take to ensure that you are able to meet the needs of the residents of Ward 7?

First of all, I understand that the first step in meeting anyone’s needs to is find out what those needs are and the best way to do that is to ask the people you intend to serve. I want to know what the experts have to say but first, I want to hear directly from the people of Ward 7. I would propose holding regular listening sessions in the Ward, possibly quarterly if time permits, where I would physically be present to hear from Ward 7 residents. I would look for solutions to eliminate food deserts in the Ward, realizing that people are not going to be at their best, school, in the workforce or in retirement if they’re not getting healthy nutritious food and that Ward 7 residents ought to have access to fresh healthy food right in their own community. I would recognize that these are the 2020s, and not the 1920s and I would direct resources to Ward 7 to make sure that every neighborhood is wi-fi accessible and every public school student has his or her own computer just like we started doing decades ago with respect to access to textbooks. I would exercise oversight over the District’s environmental protection services to ensure that residents are not living in close proximity to toxic waste sites and that no new construction, especially of residential units, takes place in any area until a thorough and complete environmental impact study has been completed. And I would access the transportation needs of the Ward, including pedestrian, cyclist and motor vehicle traffic as well as public transportation and be guided, again, by the recommendations of the impacted residents themselves.

1. How can Councilmembers better connect with communities that have lost faith in the ability of the government to solve problems?

Councilmembers need to do two things: 1) Listen, as previously stated, to the people

themselves; and 2) Don’t promise what they can’t deliver and fail to do everything within their power to deliver on everything they promise.

1. How would you describe an effective relationship of the Council Chair and other At-Large members with Ward 7?

An effective relationship needs to be congenial but not subservient. What I mean by that is that At-Large Council members should approach their responsibilities with the attitude of finding common ground and working through differences by searching for the win-win but, at the same time, they should not compromise on principles. Methods, processes and solutions can and should be flexible. Principles should and must be unwavering.

Education

1. Do you believe the per pupil formula is adequate? If so, why? If not, how would you modify the per pupil formula to ensure that all schools are sufficiently funded and facilitate equitable outcomes in communities in Ward 7 and Ward 8?

Our school system, according to recent statistics, spends more per pupil than any other system except New York City. It seems to me that the amount of money per pupil is not the problem but rather the way it’s allocated. We need to make sure that the distribution of monetary assets is intentionally calculated to correct the imbalance of school performance. Students in under performing schools or who live in economically depressed communities may need more per pupil funding. But the most significant factor in moving toward equity, in my view, is making sure that underperforming schools in depressed communities are fully staffed by highly effective teachers and principals.

1. What legislative tools would you advance to improve the ability of the Council to recruit and retain quality teachers?

I don’t believe the Council should be in the business of running the school system. I also don’t believe that the Mayor ought to be involved either. I believe our schools should be under the direction of a professional superintendent chosen by and accountable to an elected school board. I also believe that service on the school board should be limited to persons who have demonstrated, by their life’s work, that they are committed to educating our children. They should be educators, teachers and administrators, who run for the school board out of their dedication to advancing education in the District of Columbia. They should not be people who are using election to the school board as a stepping stone to higher office.

1. How could the Council exercise more effective oversight over DCPS?

I believe that Council oversight over DCPS should be limited to financial oversight. As I

indicated, day to day operations, hiring and firing of teachers and administrators, curriculum decisions, school year schedules and the like should be under the direction of the superintendent under the oversight of an elected school board.

1. How could the Council exercise more effective oversight over the Public Charter School ecosystem?

As with DCPS, I believe that Council oversight over Public Charter Schools should be limited to financial oversight. The day to day operations of our public charter schools should be left to the Public Charter School Board. The Council’s oversight should come in allocating funding which the PCS Board and it’s hired professionals should be expected to manage.

1. Are there any intervention programs you believe should be enhanced or expanded? Are there any that should be curtailed or terminated?

Yes. According to the report issued in April 2021 by the DC Police Reform Commission entitled *Decentering Police to Improve Public Safety*, “while DC public schools have, on average, one security guard for every 165 students, they have only one social worker for every 254 students, once counselor for every 352 students, and one psychologist for every 529 students.” I believe we can and should do so much better. Adequate staffing of social workers, counselors and psychologists can help break down many of the barriers that are keeping our children from reaching their full potential. Security guards are tasked with addressing conflict on the back end. Social workers, counselors and psychologists work on the front end before inequities fester into conflicts. I believe that only under the most extreme of circumstances, where, for instance, a student is brandishing a firearm inside of a school, should police officers be authorized to effectuate arrests of students on school premises. That practice, which traumatizes students and fosters a hostile environment which is not conducive to learning, should be curtailed or terminated.

Economic Development and Housing

1. Ward 7 hosts a disproportionately high percentage of vacant and dilapidated buildings and vacant lots. How would you address this issue without inadvertently depriving middle income families of a rare asset?

I would seriously consider ideas such as the following: 1) converting surplus government buildings into residential spaces; 2) creating more opportunity zones with steeply subsidized rents or mortgages for public service related workers like teachers, police officers, firefighters, EMTs and newly minted medical service providers burdened with school debt; 3) strengthening and enforcing inclusionary zoning laws that require developers to get serious about providing housing that is truly affordable for middle and low income earners.

1. The DC Housing Authority and its Board faced significant challenges in 2021. What changes, if any, are needed to sustain and increase affordable and public housing in DC? Are there any decisions on the allocation of affordable units that deserve closer scrutiny?

First of all, the Council needs to do a better job of maintaining oversight over the Housing Production Trust Fund so that we make sure that government funds intended to address our housing crisis are effectively spent. We need to maximize the use of HPTF funds to help low and moderate income earning families.

On another note, we need to take a hard look at our Inclusionary Zoning law and whether the definitions of affordability in that law are realistic and helpful. The Median Family Income (MFI), which used to be called AMI, for the District of Columbia, is based on what people earn throughout the Metropolitan area, including our wealthy suburbs. As of last July, the MFI for a family of 4 was $129,000 a year. When we consider a family of four with earnings at 30% MFI, that family’s income is only about $38,700 a year and sadly, so many of our DC families don’t earn even that much. And when we consider that the average rent of the 2 bedroom apartment in DC is $3,430 a month, which comes out to $41,160 a year, it’s clear that people need help. Even if that 30% MFI family could squeeze into a studio apartment, which is ridiculous at the onset, the annual rent would be $22,692 or 59% of the family’s total income. We can do better.

Public Safety

1. The District of Columbia is experiencing a general decline in crime, but a spike in murder. What would you identify as the core causes of this spike and what legislative tools would you suggest that could stop the increase and address the root causes?

In my view, the core causes are the proliferation of firearms and anger fueled by inequity and a sense of hopelessness. We can pass legislation to give MPD the latest tools it needs to get guns off of our streets but those efforts will likely continue to be relatively ineffective because of the status of the District of Columbia as a de-facto American colony. Because the District is not a state, any laws that the Council passes and the Mayor signs into law, which are perceived to restrict personal rights under the Second Amendment, no matter how tangentially, will continue to be vetoed by the Congress. As a state, we would have some leverage, through our representatives in the House and Senate, to help pass laws that would at least restrict traffic in deadly firearms that have been designed as weapons of war and were never intended for use in domestic settings. And we would be able to pass laws without fear of Congressional veto. I believe the Council should advocate for statehood but, in the meantime, should work with MPD, the Mayor and experts far and wide to craft legislation geared at reducing the prevalence of guns on our streets to whatever extent we can.

The other root cause, as I indicated, is that so many of our people are consumed by anger with hair trigger sensibilities. Part of the reason stems from the growing inequities in our society coupled with a sense of hopelessness. Legislatively, we can make headway by developing and funding programs to help lift people out of that state of hopelessness, programs that focus on educational equity, affordable housing and employment opportunities. But a less acknowledged reason that so many of our young people in particular are so quick to settle their disputes with fatal violence, is that many were exposed to brain-altering toxins when they were very young. As a person who has authored a thesis on environmental justice, I can tell you that there are several studies which have drawn a direct connection between children who were exposed to certain toxins as babies and toddlers and high levels of violent and socially deviant behavior attributed to that same generation of young people after they became young adults two decades later. That is why I am so determined to push for legislation to protect residents from toxic wastes. Granted, this is a long-term solution, but we have to start thinking generationally. If we don’t, we will continue to see the cycle of violence that will only get worse from one generation to the next.

1. What would you recommend that the Committee on Public Safety and Justice do to improve oversight over MPD?

## I would get behind the recommendations of the DC Police Reform Commission with regard to police accountability. I would favor creating a deputy auditor for public safety, establishing a D.C. Police Commission to oversee the Office of Police Complaints, giving the Office of Police Complaints the authority to investigate all in-custody deaths and excessive use of force claims, and ending the practice of automatically purging adverse actions from police officers’ records after three years. I would also favor limiting the ability of MPD to withhold footage of violent citizen-police encounters captured on body-worn camera from public scrutiny. And while I am not in favor of “defunding the police,” I would support shifting some of MPDs financial resources to non-law enforcement agencies with the mission and expertise to deal with the root causes of crime.

1. What legislative tools would you create or modify to reduce recidivism and reintegrate Returning Citizens into our communities?

## First of all, I’m all in for decriminalizing low-level offenses and for engaging youth in a panel format to develop methodologies for de-escalating hostile situations inside and outside of school so that our children don’t start down the pathway to the school to prison pipeline. As a one-time criminal defense attorney who represented hundreds of indigent defendants in the DC Superior Court, I’m also in agreement with other proposed reforms like banning “jump outs,” pretext stops and no-knock warrants. Rather than reducing crime, it has been my experience that over-aggressive policing, especially in matters of low-level offenses, only increases crime over the long-haul by turning redeemable low-level first offenders into downward spiraling recidivists. And I support the proposed reforms with regard to juvenile delinquency proceedings. Finally, I would be in favor of sealing or expunging misdemeanor and felony arrest and conviction records, after certain prescribed periods of time, with the exception of certain particularly egregious offenses.

Jobs and Employment

1. What legislative tools would you create or modify to increase the percentage of District employees that reside in the District of Columbia?

First, I would seriously consider legislation to convert more of our surplus government buildings into residential spaces and give preference to District employees in terms of tax break incentives. Secondly, as previously stated, I would use legislative measures to create more opportunity zones with steeply subsidized rents or mortgages for public service related workers like teachers, police officers, firefighters, EMTs and newly minted medical service providers burdened with school debt. And as a third incentive, I would act to strengthen and enforce existing inclusionary zoning laws that require developers to get serious about providing housing that is truly affordable for low and moderate income earners.

1. The unemployment rate in Ward 7 is 14%. What legislative tools would you create or modify to improve the ability of the District to restore these residents to the workforce?

I would focus attention on the District’s First Source law, the law that requires that developers who benefit from construction contracts with District Government funding or tax incentives ensure that 51% of new hires be DC residents. Everyday, I see active construction sites with dozens of workers and every evening, I see workers leaving the construction sites in vehicles with Maryland, Virginia and sometimes other states’ license plates, driving past seemingly able-bodied unemployed residents standing on street corners. One of the problems with the law is that it only applies to new hires. If a company embarks on a project that, for example, requires 100 workers and that company brings 90 employees with it from wherever the company is based such that it only has to hire 10 new workers, our law requires that only 6 of them be DC employees. Effectively, then, that company has a 6% DC resident workforce, not the 51% that the spirit of the law would suggest. We need to rethink our First Source law. As a longer-term solution though, we need to be training our young people with the skills they need to compete in the 21st century. No high schooler should be able to graduate without proficiency in IT. And we need to reinstate vocational training in Middle and High Schools. Clearly, for a myriad of reasons, not all of our children will go to college. Their chances of financial viability should not be doomed because they don’t or for whatever reason can’t get a post-secondary school education in the traditional sense*.*