

**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: ANITA BONDS

Candidate website: anitabonds2022.com

Candidate Twitter: @voteanitabonds
Candidate IG: None

Candidate Facebook: None

Other social media: None

General Questions

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

My commitment to the District is evidenced by my decades of service to the D.C. community. My top three priorities are the following:

1. To expand affordable housing to provide more housing options in the city for our workers and to slow the erosion of long-term residents by protecting middle-income folks and our seniors
2. To expand investment in public safety initiatives that reduce violent crime and increase safety in our neighborhoods
3. Give our young people a better opportunity to thrive in our city

These issues are ones that impact not just the people of color and minorities but everyone who is a DC resident. I recognize that while our economy is steadily recovering from the two-year pandemic, it has been too easy to forget and leave many of our longtime residents and certain industries of workers behind. Residents who have endured the challenging economic times and continue to make DC their home against the odds should have the opportunity to stay here and continue to build their life and home in the city. During my tenure on the Council, I have authored and co-introduced many bills that seek to protect vulnerable populations in our city, including the following:

* Safe at Home Act of 2015

Establishes a grant program for the cost of installing accessibility modifications for a person with mobility impairment or other physical disability to improve accessibility in residential housing.

* Elderly and Tenants with Disabilities Protection Amendment Act of 2016

Lowers the annual rent increase by the lowest of the Social Security, COLA, or CPI

Various changes to the law for the elderly to remain in their units

Exempts all low-income elderly and low-income tenants with a disability from rent increases due to petitions

* Public Housing Resident Bill of Rights Amendment Act of 2017

Establishes a Public Housing Resident Bill of Rights to inform residents of some of their federal and District tenancy rights.

* Public Housing Credit Building Pilot Program Act of 2017

Establishes a pilot program that will allow residents in certain public housing properties to volunteer to have the timeliness of their rent payment reported to one or more of the major credit bureaus.

* Home Purchase Assistance Program Amendment Act of 2018

Increases the down payment assistance for the lowest income recipient to $100,000 and establishes a minimum amount of assistance provided to those at 120% of the Area Median Income

* East End Grocery and Retail Incentive Program Tax Abatement Act of 2017

Waives deed recordation, real property, and personal property taxes for eligible sites in Ward 7 and 8. To qualify for the exemption a business owner shall bi-annually certify that 50% of full-time employees are District residents and the business must be located at Skyland Town Center, Capitol Gateway, East River Park, St. Elizabeth’s East Campus, or United Medical Center

* Defending Access to Women’s Health Care Services Amendment Act of 2017

Requires insurers to cover certain healthcare services without cost-sharing

* Feminine Hygiene and Diapers Sales Tax Exemption Amendment Act of 2016

Provides an exemption for feminine hygiene products and diapers from sales tax

* Rental Housing Source of Income Amendment Act of 2019

Establishes that rental hosuing assistance provided by the District government to an owner of a housing accommodation shall be considered as income for minimum income qualifications for the rental of a unit; prohibits owners from denying housing to a person because the person’s payment utilizes a voucher for rental housing assistance.

* Voluntary Agreement Moratorium Amendment Act of 2020

Places a 2-year moratorium on voluntary agreements between tenants and housing providers to curb the erosion of affordable rent control units

Work in the Housing Committee is extremely challenging and complex when many competing interests are brought to the table in hopes of striking a compromise. In all of our work, the goal is to make housing more affordable in the District of Columbia and not lose any long-standing residents, families, and our vulnerable populations.

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?

One of the measures I co-introduced and voted for is Law 22-284, which requires the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development to establish an East End Grocery Construction Incentive Program. The goal of this law is to attract affordable grocery shopping opportunities to underserved areas and pay the construction costs of new grocery stores that provide affordable food items to residents of Wards 7 and 8. Historically, Wards 7 and 8 are underserved and underfunded. Wards 7 and 8 lack access to food, also known as food deserts, and do not always receive the equitable level of services. Food and food accessibility affects the lives of all residents. I have supported and will continue to support mixed use developments and mixed income housing that include retail and services, which are essential to moving Ward 7 forward.

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

This question is a great one, and it reminds me of the main reason that I’ve dedicated much of my career to public service and community activism. There are many ways to connect with disenfranchised populations, and it often depends on the specific group that you are dealing with. People lose faith when critical systems fail. The most important thing, in my opinion, is that a public servant must be a good and intense listener. We can not affect change with a top-down approach. Instead, change must come up from the grassroots level. This is why creating strong community ties and cultivating strong relationships with neighborhoods all over the city are such a big part of my focus.

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

The roots of any effective relationship between colleagues are consistent two-way communications. I have a very good relationship with Chairman Mendelson and with Councilmember Gray. I have worked closely with both of them on numerous bills and resolutions. However, my relationship with Ward 7 is not defined by my connection with the Councilmember; I must continue to maintain my connections with the political and civic organizations in the Ward. This is something I take pride in. I have worked as a community organizer, ANC commissioner and Democratic party leader, so I know how important personal relationships are. We have a lot of work to do, and we can only complete this work by working closely together.

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?

I will push each year for the administration to increase transparency in its publicly available budget information, especially by more effectively tracking and providing rational guidance on how that money should be spent. For example, if the Council is able to see what schools are purchasing, and are expected to purchase, with their per-student At-Risk enhancements, my colleagues and I can provide more effective oversight throughout the fiscal year. I understand that the need for adaptability affects how specifically funding can be directed at the outset.

However, we have seen that a substantial amount of At-Risk funding has been spent on essential functions for which base funding should be used. This most likely signals two things: (1) Schools do not have adequate resources or facilities to fully carry out their essential functions with base funding only, and (2) current administrative oversight and guidance for the use of At-Risk funding is not adequate too ensure proper use of the funds. I will continue to be a strong advocate in support of funding all of our students, especially our most at-risk students, in a manner that will help facilitate equitable educational outcomes.

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

One powerful tool we have already exists, but we have to secure the funding for it. That tool is The Birth-To-Three for the DC ACT of 2018 which would require $200 million over several years to provide for equitable compensation for early childhood educators, among other things. Our teachers are so important, but we often forget that that group includes caretakers of toddlers and students under 4 years old. These educators also deserve to be compensated well.

We also need to make sure that our teachers are safe and that their working environment is healthy. Although there appears to be a light at the end of this COVID tunnel, we must adjust to a lifestyle that will remain impacted by COVID. For example, teachers should not be forced to come to work when sick, and we have to make sure that they have everything they need to ensure their own health. This included PPE and testing materials. I am proud to lead the fight to make sure the District received federal dollars from the CARES Act, which helped keep our frontline and essential workers protected.

To fund the law mentioned above and secure the funding to attract quality teachers, I certainly support progressive taxation systems to raise the funds. I also think it is important to be responsible stewards of tax dollars, and work within our means as much as possible. It’s important to maintain a vibrant and thriving economy for our local small businesses, for example, to provide good jobs for families.I was an early supporter of Early Childhood Education for every child, and have always been a strong supporter of childcare services for birth to three, including neonatal care.

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

I understand why we abolished the standalone Committee on Education and placed it under the purview of the Committee on the Whole, but I do believe that we should re-establish the Committee on Education at some point in the future. This will help to eliminate long delays in council response to urgent education issues that surfaced from the community. I personally would support legislation that provides a more substantial oversight role for the school board than it currently has. A school board that is empowered to step in and act on behalf of the community would be a positive and democratizing force in the government, but our current school board is hampered in representing its constituents effectively due to a lack of means to influence policy.

However, I could not support a full return to school board control from Mayoral control, or giving the board the sole authority to hire top administrative leadership. While progress has not been fast enough, and clearly identified needs must be addressed more aggressively, our public education system is improving steadily. In my opinion, to address current problems by simply turning back to an old paradigm would not be adequate and would have many unforeseen consequences.

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

See answer to number 3 above.

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

I am big believer in the recently expanded Safe Passage Safe Blocks program and the new DC SchoolConnect initiative. The Safe Passage Safe Blocks initiative builds on the current Safe Passage work being done in the certain Priority Areas. These areas are places where students have an increased need for additional supports, transportation solutions and violence prevention interventions to ensure safe travel to and from school. DC SchoolConnect also operates at certain schools in these same locations where the District has deployed additional safety resources, particularly around school arrival and dismissal hours, and violence interrupters, who provide support in the surrounding communities. This program provides Vans and sedans to transport students to and from school with “microstops” near each school.

These services are examples of the types of supplemental services we must provide in conjunction with the learning that occurs in the classroom. These investments show that we can execute smart policies through collaborative partnerships with respected organizations in the community. This will help to build community trust in the government and its institutions while promoting conflict resolution and violence interruption in our communities.

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've also been a strong supporter of limited equity cooperatives and have worked to expand limited equity cooperatives throughout the city. The cooperative model of homeownership is a great form of affordability that strengthens neighborhoods and gives people a stake in their communities.

I also support programs to keep people, especially seniors, in their homes, which keeps neighborhoods safe, stable, and secure. Policies such as tax abatements, grants to make repairs and safety improvements, opportunities to create accessory dwellings units, and others, have helped stabilize neighborhoods by keeping long-time residents in their homes and, also, putting vacant or dilapidated buildings to effective use.

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?

I support policies to require that all new housing developments include units that are affordable to many income levels. Our priorities must continue to be to develop more affordable housing in every Ward, including West of Rock Creek Park, using mechanisms such as the Housing Production Trust Fund (since 2015, I have helped to guide more than $1 billion of investments in affordable housing through the HPTF).

I am strongly committed to continuing to fund government programs that fill critical gaps. For example, many of our older housing properties are showing signs of aging - we need to find ways to support landlords and tenants who want to maintain both the livability and the affordability of their properties, through tax credits, low-interest loans, or grant programs, rather than forcing landlords to sell, or placing them under a court-ordered receivership.

It's also vitally important for the government to maintain our investments in public housing, perhaps the single most important source of housing for extremely low-income households. The DC Housing Authority is the District's largest landlord, with close to 8,000 units in its housing portfolio. It also administers the federal and local housing voucher programs.  I've increased DCHA's budgets for repairs and maintenance of its properties, and for its voucher programs, each year I've served on the Council.

I believe that innovation and new policy tools have an important role to play, in not only slowing displacement, but in creating more affordable housing especially for workers and working families. Direct housing subsidies for working families is one of the keys to maintaining a mix of incomes in the District. Teachers, police officers, fire fighters, health care workers, sanitation workers, security guards, restaurant workers, and so many others - should be able to find housing they can afford in the city where they work, and where we all benefit from their services. We need to tap into every policy tool at our disposal, such as Inclusionary Zoning, first time home buyers’ assistance programs, limited equity cooperatives, and direct subsidies for workers and working families, to be able to afford the rent.

Finally, I continue to support strengthening the District's rent stabilization laws, and our strong tenant protection laws that are already on the books. I look forward to continuing the work to strengthen those laws, and to streamlining the government agencies responsible for enforcing them.

I was the leading author of the eviction moratorium provisions that kept District residents housed during the public health emergency, and the leading champion in the Council of the District’s STAY DC program, to help pay the rents of any tenants who fell behind on their payments due to impacts of the pandemic. I have pushed, and will continue to push, the executive to find funds for rent relief, to mortgage payment relief, to keep seniors in the homes, and, to the extent possible, to keep landlords, especially small landlords, whole. There is no candidate who has done more, or who will do more, to keep our residents safe, stable, and secure in their homes.

It’s a community challenge, and all voices in the community should be represented in the question of where homeless individuals should be able to set up camp. I believe strongly in family values - families, families with children, and our seniors, also have a right to enjoy public spaces. We must, in the spirit of your traditions as well as mine, find ways to balance competing interests in our fellowship of community. In that context, it did not make sense to me to tie the Mayor’s hands in dealing with the encampments, though I support the humane and dignified treatment of every person in our community.

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?

I joined with Councilmember Gray to establish the DC Police Reform Commissionas an amendment to the comprehensive policing and public safety reform legislation that was considered by the Council in 2020. After the murders of George Floyd and too many other persons of color by police forces in 2020, the DC Council was quick to react to these grave injustices. As members of the Judiciary Committee we strongly felt that these challenges were too important to try to address through a piecemeal, ad-hoc approach, which is why we worked together to stand up the Commission so that sweeping reforms could be implemented through a process of comprehensive review.

Initially, many expected the Commission to identify numerous areas of recommendations on police behavior, as has been the custom in many jurisdictions across the country. However, the commission devoted much needed attention on police and law enforcement interaction with DC youth and the critical needs for juvenile justice reform. Moreover, the Commission findings point to the community’s need for accountability from our youth, public safety is a two-way process. Improving the quality of life focused in neighborhoods of neglect is tantamount to helping today’s youth build trust and take initiative to move forward away from unproductive lifestyles. Ultimately, the District must focus more on improving the lives of our young people.

One of the more promising violence-fighting initiatives in Building Blocks. What we have found is that a small percentage of people commit a very large percentage of gun related offenses. We need to be proactive about addressing the issues faced by providing mental health services, stable housing, jobs and support to households involved in communities of neglect where violence and crime breeds. I am proud that the program will offer mini-grants to individuals and organizations who will create innovative programs to reduce gun violence in the District of Columbia. This program will allow us to identify high-performing organizations and replicate their programming efforts on a larger scale in the District.

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

I believe that we must push for increased transparency. The lack of transparency on behalf of MPD has eroded the public trust in the police, and continues to hamper our efforts to recruit and retain good police officers. There have been recent allegations that officers who make complaints related to employment discrimination, harrassment or retaliation are not getting the support they need.

Transparency can only increase if MPD staffing is adequate and if budgetary restraints are relaxed. According to recent testimony of the MPD, they have lost 260 officers in the last 16 months. This is a dramatic drop, and has no doubt contributed to longer response times. In fact, Police Chief Robert Contee says that the average response time went up a minute and a half in 2021 when compared to 2020. We have to recruit new officers, and create an environment that is attractive to officers who wish to truly protect and serve the community. Also, bringing officers back into community policing activities can contribute to neighborhood safety.

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

As I mentioned above, I believe that the report produced by the Police Reform Commission made wonderful recommendations. As is always the case, of course, such recommendations must be put into legislative text and receive legal sufficiency and financial impact statements from the DC Council’s budget and general counsel staff. I would also note that the Council is still in the process of attaining a better understanding of how the city’s various violence interruption programs interface with each other, although these are initiatives that I wholeheartedly support. The Council must continue working expeditiously to implement the Commission’s recommendations while also continuing to monitor the progress of what are often relatively new programs. For example, we can expand the use of cameras to enforce law related to minor offenses and even discuss utilizing the Department of Transportation as the main agency that handles minor traffic offenses that involve no suspicion of serious criminal activity. We have to make sure that our police work for us. As an At-Large Councilmember who sits on the Judiciary and Public Safety Committee and who oversees Building Blocks in my own committee, I pledge to remain focused on these issues and advance the Commission's recommendations, particularly as we continue to grapple with the nexus between the COVID-19 epidemic and high rates of violence in our city.

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?

I think we do a great job of employing our District residents. I believe that we could create agreements with developers to ensure that certain capital projects reserve a certain percentage of future jobs arising from the development for people from the surrounding areas and neighborhoods. This could be a way to help increase employment opportunities for people in the District.

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?

We have to make sure that these new developments are compelled to hire D.C. residents, and I know we can do it. This is especially true in areas with untapped development potential like Ward 7. For example, I worked with your Councilmember, Vince Gray, to pass the East End Grocery and Retail Incentive Program Tax Abatement Act, which Waives deed recordation, real property, and personal property taxes for eligible sites in Ward 7 and 8. To qualify for the exemption a business owner shall bi-annually certify that 50% of full-time employees are District residents and the business must be located at Skyland Town Center, Capitol Gateway, East River Park, St. Elizabeth’s East Campus, or United Medical Center. These are the types of efforts that can increase job opportunities for Ward 7.