



Ward 7 Councilmember Candidate Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the 2024 Ward 7 Democrats Candidate Forum for candidates in the Democratic Primary for the **Ward 7 Council seat**. 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 Wednesday, March 13, 2024. 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: Veda Rasheed

Current Neighborhood: Hillcrest

Candidate website: www.voteforveda.com

Candidate Twitter: <https://twitter.com/vedarasheed>

Candidate IG: <https://www.instagram.com/VoteforVeda/>

Candidate Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VedaforWard7>

Other social media:

General Questions

1. What makes you the right selection for the Democratic nomination for Ward 7 Councilmember?

I am a mother, a practicing attorney, a lifelong Ward 7 resident, and have served in every branch of DC government professionally or on a volunteer basis. My community is behind me like I've been behind them, and I am ready to lead to bring the change we need as the next Ward 7 Councilmember.

As a native Washingtonian and a lifelong resident of Ward 7, I want to continue my work for the community that has poured into me for my entire life. I know this area better than most, and I made a conscious decision to remain in Ward 7 and raise my two boys here and have devoted my life and my career to supporting my family, friends, and neighbors across Ward 7. Whether through volunteer leadership or elected office, I have served in every branch of DC government and have the practical experience to work collaboratively with groups, agencies, and other stakeholders

across DC to address critical issues our ward and city face. My experience and the relationships I have developed have positioned me to hold our government and agencies accountable to our residents to make sure everyone has the tools and resources available to participate in the myriad of services our city offers. None of my opponents can say the same. Finally, as a small business owner and practicing attorney, I continue to serve the Ward 7 community by offering my services to win justice for my clients.

Ward 7 deserves more, and my experience and belonging to this amazing community I've always called home makes me the best candidate to chart a path forward. I'm ready to lead to bring the change we need to Ward 7.

[You can read more about my experience at my website.](#)

2. How would you build relationships with the Council, Mayor, and Ward 7 Candidates who were unsuccessful in their bid to ensure that the needs of Ward 7 residents are met?

As someone who has served in every branch of DC government in several professional and volunteer roles, I deeply understand the importance of building relationships with all stakeholders, including the mayor, fellow councilmembers, and former Ward 7 Councilmember candidates.

I will make myself available to meet with folks regularly, including those listed. This will include hosting town hall-style meetings where all stakeholders can come together and discuss pressing issues in the community. Additionally, I will make myself accessible to these individuals through my office so that they can share their thoughts and concerns with me directly. I will also actively seek out opportunities to collaborate with them on policy proposals and initiatives. This could involve working together on legislation, hosting joint town halls, or co-hosting other events that benefit the community as a whole.

Finally, I have a strong constituent services platform which includes several, regular opportunities to engage with Ward 7 constituents and other stakeholders. The following are some points in my platform, which relate directly to how I will hold myself accountable to constituents and encourage open and honest dialogue with the people I serve with and serve for:

1. Accessibility and Outreach
 - a. Open Door Policy: Maintain specific hours weekly where constituents can directly meet with me without prior appointments, ensuring accessibility.

- b. Regular Ward Walks: Monthly engagements where I and my team will walk through different parts of Ward 7, interacting directly with constituents and understanding on-ground issues.
2. Regular Feedback Mechanisms
 - a. Constituent Surveys: Periodic electronic and paper surveys to gauge satisfaction levels, areas of improvement, and emerging concerns.
 - b. Feedback Forums: Quarterly community gatherings where constituents can openly discuss the efficacy of services received, and suggest improvements.
 3. Collaboration with Local Organizations
 - a. Partnerships: Collaborate with community organizations, non-profits, and local businesses to enhance the reach and efficacy of services.
 - b. Resource Pooling: Join forces with local entities to create a shared resource bank, ensuring that constituents always have avenues for support.
 4. Educational Initiatives
 - a. Know Your Rights Workshops: Regular community workshops in collaboration with community organizations, electeds, and community leaders detailing residents' rights, available city services, and the impact of new legislation on Ward 7 residents.
 - b. Resource Fairs: Bi-annual events showcasing all available resources and services, from housing assistance to entrepreneurial grants.

A representative's efficacy is not just measured by the policies they create but by the tangible difference they make in the daily lives of their constituents. The people of Ward 7 deserve a councilwoman who is not just present in legislative chambers but is a visible, accessible, and responsive force in the community. Building strong relationships with all stakeholders is crucial for ensuring that the needs of Ward 7 residents are met. By making myself accessible, actively seeking out opportunities to collaborate, and regularly engaging with these individuals, I can help to create a more cohesive, responsive, and effective government.

Education

In recent years, Ward 7 has faced significant challenges in public education, including disparities in academic achievement, access to resources, and support for special education. If elected to the Ward 7 Council seat, what specific measures will you implement to address these educational disparities and ensure that all children in Ward 7 have equitable access to high-quality education and support services?

As a single mother to two boys, I know firsthand how important it is to ensure high-quality, affordable, and accessible childcare and education for our young people. Also, as a former PAVE Parent Representative and MySchool DC Ward 7 Parent Leader, I know that high-quality childcare and education are not just important for our children's future; it's also crucial for the economic vitality of our city.

We need a childcare and education system that is accessible, affordable, and high-quality for every family in our city. To achieve this goal, I will advocate for policies such as:

Early childhood care and education

- Expanding the Birth to Three Act;
- Increasing funding for childcare providers to support increased wages and benefits for early educators, who are primarily women of color and often earn poverty wages even while performing some of the most important work in our city;
- Supporting initiatives that prioritize the recruitment, training, and professional development of new and existing childcare providers, with a focus on those from underrepresented communities. This will not only help to address the lack of childcare supply, but it will also create job opportunities for individuals who might not otherwise be able to find work in the field; and
- Making sure that families have access to culturally and linguistically relevant caregivers. We need to ensure that children feel welcomed, seen, and valued in their childcare settings.

Education

- Recruit, hire, and retain high-quality educators by offering competitive salaries, improving working conditions, providing adequate funding for schools, and investing in recruitment efforts.
- Prioritizing the safety and well-being of students in and outside of the classroom by expanding investments in Safe Passage and enhancing the availability of mental health professionals and counselors for students in and outside of school.
- Building stronger community bonds by encouraging interactions between students, teachers, and community members and increasing transparency in education spending to ensure trust and accountability.
- Prioritizing literacy standards by increasing targeted interventions for students falling behind and expanding training opportunities for educators to refine their literacy teaching methodologies and approach to classroom learning.
- Elevating standards for facilities, in-school resources for students, teachers, and staff, and educator excellence to ensure happy, healthy environments conducive to academic achievement and social-emotional development.

- Championing inclusive education by overhauling the system to eliminate complexities in special education programs to ensure seamless integration and achievement for impacted students, as well as conducting periodic assessments with transparent reporting to make sure we're tackling systemic issues where they are.

By prioritizing our children, families, early childhood care providers, educators, and school support staff, we can create a childcare and education system that is accessible, affordable, and high-quality for everyone in our city.

Economic Development

In light of the current economic landscape in Ward 7, as Ward 7 Councilmember, what innovative measures would you propose to bolster economic development in Ward 7?

As Ward 7 Councilmember, I will propose a multi-faceted approach to bolster economic development in the area. Some measures I will support are as follows:

1. Promote livable wages by fighting to increase the minimum wage to account for DC's true cost of living and offer tax breaks for businesses that pay their employees a true living wage;
2. Prioritize affordable housing by ensuring that developments reserve a significant portion of units for affordable housing and expand homeownership programs to ensure that more people have access to purchasing a home in the District. This also includes ensuring that generational homeowners are not priced out of their neighborhoods by ever-rising property taxes;
3. Prioritizing generational wealth growth by expanding and initiating concentrated financial literacy programs and supporting local businesses through robust community engagement.
4. Amending the tax code to give regular folks a much-needed bump of support. This includes mandating a permanent Child Tax Credit, as well as a tax credit for formerly-incarcerated people;
5. Strengthening infrastructure and connectivity by improving transportation options for communities like mine, as well as expanding service and eliminating "dead zones" for internet and cell signals across all four corners of DC;
6. Improving physical infrastructure like transportation options, upgrading community facilities, and revitalizing public spaces to attract residents and businesses alike;
7. Prioritizing job training and skill development by ensuring existing programs and community colleges have the resources they need to train interested workers. I will also

work to launch initiatives targeting historically-underrepresented communities to increase entrepreneurship by providing skill training, mentorship, and access to necessary resources. I'd also work with local banks to create accessible and non-predatory loan programs for budding entrepreneurs, as well as working with local businesses and community spaces to development business incubators and hubs for current and future entrepreneurs;

8. Foster community-led development initiatives that prioritize measures like the establishment of community land trusts or cooperatives to acquire and develop properties, all while ensuring that local voices are central to decision-making processes;
9. Implement policies and incentives to encourage equitable development that benefits both residents and investors, including tax incentives for developers who commit to affordable housing units, mixed-use developments that incorporate small businesses, and community amenities;
10. Provide comprehensive support for small businesses in Ward 7, including access to capital, technical assistance, and marketing resources, and establish incubator programs and shared commercial spaces to nurture entrepreneurship and help local businesses thrive;
11. Invest in workforce development programs tailored to the needs of Ward 7 residents, particularly those disproportionately impacted by unemployment and underemployment. Partner with local businesses and educational institutions to provide training, apprenticeships, and job placement services;
12. Promote green and sustainable development practices to build a resilient and environmentally friendly Ward 7. Encourage energy-efficient building design, green infrastructure projects, and sustainable transportation options to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change impacts; and
13. Forge partnerships with stakeholders across sectors, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and private sector entities. By collaborating with diverse partners, we can leverage resources, expertise, and networks to maximize the impact of economic development efforts in Ward 7.

By implementing these innovative measures, we can catalyze economic development in Ward 7 while ensuring that all residents benefit from the opportunities created. It's essential to prioritize inclusivity, equity, and sustainability in our approach to building a vibrant and resilient community for generations to come.

Housing

In October of 2023, the agencies that fund HPAP (the District's Primary First-time homebuyers' program), revised their distribution requirements to be based on a "first come first serve basis." By January of 2024, all funds were exhausted. This development shook lenders, Realtors, and especially, first time home buyers. As Ward 7 Councilmember, what specific measures and/or initiatives would you champion to improve homeownership opportunities for individuals and families who would like to make our Ward their home?

Housing isn't just a structure; it's a foundation for security, community, and prosperity. The vision for D.C., especially areas East of the River, is one where every resident can afford a comfortable home, free from the anxieties of displacement or untenable costs. Through concerted effort, collaboration, and innovative solutions, we can ensure that the dream of affordable housing becomes a reality for all. When I am on the DC Council, my legislative priorities for affordable housing will be as follows:

1. Housing Voucher Program Enhancements
 - a. Increased Funding: Allocate additional funds to housing voucher programs, ensuring more families can benefit.
 - b. Partnerships with Landlords: Collaborate with landlords to accept housing vouchers, increasing the range of housing options available to beneficiaries.

2. Expansion of Affordable Housing Units
 - a. New Developments: Incentivize private developers to allocate a portion of their new projects for affordable housing through tax breaks or zoning benefits.
 - b. Rehabilitation Programs: Offer grants or tax reductions to property owners who commit to renovating and maintaining older buildings as affordable rental units, particularly single-family homes.

3. Down-Payment Assistance and Homeownership Programs
 - a. Financial Assistance: Expand down payment assistance programs tailored for residents East of the River, facilitating homeownership. We must also reduce the red tape that prevents too many people from purchasing housing under the program. We should also expand assistance eligibility for educators, firefighters, police, healthcare workers, non-profit workers, and more.
 - b. Financial Literacy Workshops: Organize more accessible community workshops educating potential homeowners on budgeting, mortgages, and other essential financial topics.

I will also work to accomplish the following:

1. Rent Control and Tenant Protections
 - a. Rent Cap and strengthen tenant rights: Strictly enforce a rent control policy that ties annual rent increases to inflation. Work with the DC Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Rent Administrator (RAD) to strengthen protections against unfair evictions and ensure that tenants are well-informed of their rights.
2. Addressing Property Taxes
 - a. Offer property tax reductions for residents who have lived in historically-disenfranchised communities for an extended period, ensuring they aren't priced out of their homes due to rising valuations.
3. Innovative Housing Solutions and Community Land Trusts (CLTs)
 - a. Expand tiny homes & modular and cooperative housing options.
 - b. Support the formation of CLTs that will acquire, hold, and lease land for housing purposes and engage local residents in CLT governance.

Public Safety

Ward 7 and the entire city is experiencing an increase in crime. 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?

East of the River, like all of D.C., deserves an environment full of promise and free from fear. By being smart on crime, focusing on root causes, and promoting community-centered solutions, we can build a brighter, safer future for all residents. On the DC Council, I will lead in reshaping our narrative on crime and public safety.

The core causes of the recent spike in crime in Ward 7 and throughout the city are complex and multifaceted. Some factors that may be contributing to this trend include:

1. A lack of investment in programs and services that support our communities, including education, job training, mental health resources, and more;
2. Punitive policies that criminalize poverty, homelessness, and other marginalized groups; and
3. Underfunding and understaffing of police departments and the criminal justice system as a whole.

To address these underlying causes of crime and create real safety for our communities, we need to adopt a holistic approach that prioritizes investment in resources that support residents and promote public safety. Some specific legislative tools that I would champion include:

1. Investing in community-based programs and services that address the root causes of crime, such as lack of access to education, employment, mental health care, housing, and other basic needs;
2. Advocating for policies that reduce barriers to employment for individuals with criminal records and expand opportunities for residents who are returning home from prison or jail;
3. Prioritizing youth engagement and intervention programs by funding youth centers and mentorships programs aimed to keep our youth from turning to criminal activity;
4. Economic investments for hard-hit communities, especially east of the river, with local business incentives to operate in and hire from communities with high unemployment rates and increase access to skill training centers and programs with local community colleges;
5. Improving affordable housing access and taking steps to alleviate homelessness by investing in new and existing programs; and
6. Investing in restorative justice programs, including a focus on restorative incarceration, mediation programs, violence interruptors, and increased focus on community service.

Achieving true and lasting public safety requires a multi-pronged solution that prioritizes understanding over judgment, prevention before punishment, and community togetherness over division. By focusing on these solutions, we can address the root causes of crime and work towards creating a safer city for all residents.

Transportation

What do you see as the biggest transportation needs facing Ward 7 residents? As Ward 7 Councilmember, what specific measures and/or initiatives would you champion to improve the transportation infrastructure in Ward 7.

Improving the transportation infrastructure is a key issue facing Ward 7 residents. Some of the biggest transportation needs include improving access to reliable public transportation options, making streets, sidewalks, and crosswalks safe and accessible for all users, and ensuring that the city's infrastructure can handle the increasing number of people living in Ward 7.

As the next Ward 7 Councilmember, I will champion a number of measures and initiatives to address these needs. Firstly, I will work to improve access to reliable public transportation options by advocating for more bus lines and additional funding for the bus system. Additionally, I will support the expansion of our Metro system and advocate for a change in how Metro fares work. It is unfair that so many DC residents, especially those east of the river, have to pay extra to get to work. Those who live closest to our economic and political strongholds are those who pay the least to use our transportation systems, whereas residents in Wards 7 and 8 hold the majority of the most economically depressed communities in our city but are expected to pay the most to get to and from work. That needs to change.

Finally, to make streets, sidewalks, and crosswalks safer for all users, I will advocate for more pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, as well as increased enforcement of traffic laws to ensure that drivers follow the rules and pedestrians remain safe. To ensure that our infrastructure can handle the increasing population in Ward 7, I will support investments in transportation projects that improve access to employment opportunities and other essential services for residents.

Health & Human Services

What are the biggest health and human services challenges that you see facing Ward 7 residents? As Ward 7 Councilmember, what specific measures and/or initiatives would you champion to improve health outcomes of Ward 7 residents?

As a native of Washington, DC, and a lifelong Ward 7 resident, I understand firsthand the importance of addressing the health and human services challenges facing Ward 7 residents. Health and human services are intersectional concerns that require holistic approaches to areas like healthcare, housing instability, and food insecurity.

To improve health outcomes of Ward 7 residents, as Councilmember I will champion specific measures and initiatives such as, but not limited to, the following:

1. Increasing funding for the Department of Health so that it can hire more public health nurses to do community health work;
2. Working with the Mayor's office to ensure that any new development in Ward 7 includes adequate affordable housing units, and advocating for measures like vouchers for residents who have been priced out of their homes due to gentrification; and

3. Addressing food insecurity by creating programs that make healthy food more accessible to all Ward 7 residents, including those living in areas where fresh produce is not readily available. This could involve using public land to create gardens and supporting organizations that are already working to address food access issues, as well as getting as many new and high-quality grocery stores across communities in Ward 7 and Ward 8 as possible.

It is a legislative priority for me to continue Mayor Gray's legacy of expanding health equity across Ward 7. I will work tirelessly to champion measures that address the specific needs of Ward 7 residents and improve health outcomes for all members of our community.