



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: Dexter Williams

Candidate website: www.dexter4dc.com

Candidate Twitter: @dexterowilliams

General Questions

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

I'm a lifelong Democrat who has been an active member of the DC Democratic Party for many years. I've had leadership roles with the DC Young Democrats, Ward 7 Democrats, and I'm currently an elected member of the of the DC Democratic State Committee, representing Ward 7. In each of these roles, I worked to increase voter participation and interest in the Democratic Party.

Because I am grounded in Ward 7, I understand the many parts and wards that make up the entire city. As the city continues to change, I see firsthand how Ward 7 and Ward 8 have continue to struggle to have the same amenities enjoyed in other parts of the city. I also bring to the table a strong policy background and the ability serve all 8 Wards, while effectively and skillfully rebalancing and bringing resources to the marginalize. I know how to leverage and utilize funds, the brainpower of the many community leaders and organizations, and to balance the need for economic growth and stability, without harming and bringing opportunities for those who need it most.

Also, I learned a lot as a policy staffer for At-Large Councilmember Robert White. In that role, I covered transportation, environmental, and criminal justice issues. I know the

inner workings of the Wilson Building, but I also know and understand the inner workings of the people, the communities, and businesses. We need a strong policy maker with a realistic and actionable plan for the city.

2. 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?

I'm a native Washingtonian who grew up in Ward 7. I know how we have always been and considered an afterthought. We over index on so called 'affordable housing' poverty, low education, low scoring schools, crime, underdevelopment, and more. We haven't always gotten the attention from government that we deserve, despite our best efforts. I am focused on equity, strong and realistic policies that focuses on education with strong input from Ward 7 leaders, development that draws the middle-income tax base we need east of the river, while protecting and securing housing opportunities for working families. I want to strengthen and leverage every part of Ward 7, not just the areas with strong voting records and higher income. I plan to focus on housing and financial protections for our seniors; increasing safe and walkable communities and providing sensible opportunities for our youth to help them develop and keep them anchored. I am a product of this community; its why I am running.

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

People don't feel like their government works for them. When I talk to residents, they often tell me that no one cares about them and that they are left to fend for themselves. There are some councilmembers who listen to the powerful, without hearing the voice of emerging leaders, our youth, our struggling small businesses, and adults who are under educated or underkilled. I'm running for this office because the comfort of the seat cannot blind you from the discomfort of many in our city. The Council can improve this by improving the pipeline for everyday residents, taking hearings to the streets, providing strong oversight over city agencies and making sure they are accountable to people's needs.

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

I worked at the Council as a policy staffer for At-Large Councilmember Robert White. From my experience, it's important to build relationships with all your colleagues. People need to know who you are and what you're trying to achieve for residents. It plays a key role in how effective you'll be in the Wilson Building. I already have working relationships with staff members and councilmembers. My former colleagues know that I'm the type of person that is pragmatic and wants to pass laws that truly helps people get ahead in a city that is increasingly expensive. As an At-Large Councilmember, I will build on those relationships and work with my colleagues on shared interests.

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?

When it comes to making improvements to our education system, we always must ask what's in the best interest of our children. That must be our guiding framework. My mother is a retired DCPS teacher, and I grew up hearing about the lack of resources for our schools and how it impacted her students. We've made progress over the years but there is still more work to be done. I applaud the Administration for its recent budget proposal to increase the per pupil formula by nearly 6 percent. It will help address the deep inequities in our school system. We need to ensure that special funds do not supplant local school budgets and have a student-based budget model.

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

Our school system has a 25 percent attrition rate, which is significantly higher than the national average of 16 percent. Many teachers are burdened from the work culture and workload, there are tensions between school leadership and teachers, and there's a general lack of support for teachers. Teachers need to feel safe, with the resources to do their jobs. All these issues cause teachers to leave our schools. Ultimately, this impacts our children. It creates instability in the classroom and impacts academic performance. My mother was a DCPS teacher. She had similar experiences, and it's a shame that these issues still exist today. If we aggressively work to solve these issues, it will signal to potential teacher candidates that our school system is a great place to work and build a career. I support having a flexible learning environment and when teachers come back from an extended period of leave, they should be able to ease back into the teaching role, which will be less burdensome and create a sense of stability.

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

The Council needs to create a stand-alone education committee. Having the education portfolio under the Committee of the Whole (COW) does not serve our students well. The COW has several large agencies within its jurisdiction, and it's hard to provide the necessary level of oversight over our education agencies with competing priorities. This means that it's harder to hold the school system accountable and ensure that students are getting everything they need to be successful in life.

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

Our public charter schools receive public funds to educate our children and run their organizations. So, the Council should use every available tool to ensure accountability of charters. One of the ways I will hold charters accountable is by attending the

confirmation hearings of Public Charter School Board (PCSB) nominees and engage them to ensure that they will demand transparency, high quality offerings, and fiscal responsibility from charter schools. The Council has robust engagement with nominees to lead our education agencies, and I believe the same level of scrutiny should be applied to PCSB candidates.

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?

Ward 7 needs new development so we can have amenities in our own communities to take care of our basic needs and strengthen our economic power in the city. It's important that Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, community groups, and residents participate in the development process. With community input, the city can avoid unintended consequences and ensure that everyone benefits.

2. 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?

It's embarrassing and shameful that the DC Housing Authority has had so many challenges, particularly in the past few years. The Council's Committee on Housing has not been effective in providing the type of oversight the agency clearly needs. The conditions of our public housing buildings are simply not conducive for living. The treatment of our residents and the working conditions and culture for staff needs to change. This impacts the quality of life for residents, and we need to make sure that our facilities are livable by making additional investments in maintenance and ensuring that our facilities are free of rodents.

We need a multipronged approach to address the affordability crisis. I will support efforts that take a serious look at converting office buildings into housing, particularly in the downtown area. The Council commissioned a study on the issue, but the pandemic has since renewed interests in exploring this option to solve our affordability crisis. Over 18 percent of office buildings are vacant, and the vacancy rate is expected to increase. This presents the city with an opportunity to reimagine the downtown area. We will not only have to look at the feasibility of conversions, but if they are doable at scale, we will also have to plan to bring amenities to the converted areas to make it an attractive place to live.

Also, I will provide aggressive oversight over the Housing Production Trust Fund. The goal of the Fund is to provide financial resources to build affordable housing. Unfortunately, the Fund has not always lived up to its purpose of building affordable units for residents that need it the most, and its resources are poorly managed. This hurts residents, and I will use the tools of Council (i.e., oversight hearings and legislation) to

hold DCHD accountable, ensuring that the agency is allocating resources wisely and appropriately. In addition to that, I will work to ensure that our affordable housing stock does not continue to decline and expand our rental assistance program to ensure that we have enough resources to meet the need. We need to pay particular attention to the system that compromises workforce housing and sometimes pits those goals against affordable housing goals. The entire system that determines MFI and impacts needs to be overhauled and measured against 21st century and developing needs.

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?

The increase in crime is very concerning all over the city, but still per capita rates are higher east of the river than certain areas in other parts of the city. Recently, there was a shooting in my mother's neighborhood. A group of people were in their cars chasing a young man trying to shoot him. They drove down my mom's street and the bullets went through her car. I'm grateful that she and other people weren't outside when this happened. It's scary, and so many people in this city are concerned about their safety. No one should have to live in fear of being a victim of a senseless crime. When I think about what causes incidents like my family experienced, I think about the environment people live in, their upbringing, etc. Typically, the problems are generational, and rooted in not having opportunities, peer pressure, or neglect. We must look at these issues comprehensively and invest in jobs and education. Also, we need to immediately reimagine the Summer Youth Employment Program. It's an opportunity to put money in young people's pocket while also giving them something productive to do instead of choosing crime out of necessity.

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

I applaud the Committee for holding a public hearing on the Metropolitan Police Department this week. The police chief was asked tough questions about the recent uptick in violence, carjackings, and allegations of misconduct. The Council has passed several legislative reforms to address the issues within MPD. I would recommend swift passage of Chairman Mendelson's bill to establish a Deputy Auditor for Public Safety within the Auditor's office. It was a Police Commission recommendation and would be an excellent tool to hold MPD more accountable.

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

We must make sure that our returning citizens have a strong support system and opportunities when they return home. It's the best way to reintegrate them back into the community and reduce their chances of being incarcerated again.

When I was a policy staffer for At-Large Councilmember Robert White, I drafted the Access to Jobs Act, which created a pilot program to give our returning citizens an opportunity to build careers and provide for their families. I also drafted the Restore the Vote Act, which gave our incarcerated residents serving time in federal facilities across the country the right to vote in local elections. Hundreds of incarcerated residents voted for the first time in the 2020 election. It changed their lives. It gave them a sense of pride. They were engaged in the democratic process, and they finally had a say in deciding who makes policy decisions for their families. Allowing them to vote, made them feel more connected to the community and the issues in the city. So, when they return home, their transition into the community will have long-term success.

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 agree that we need to increase the number of District employees that live in the city. It ensures that government workers are more connected and invested in the community. It would also contribute to the city's economic growth. I would want the Auditor to do a comprehensive study that focuses on the number of government workers that live in the city, the agencies that they work in, and identify, where appropriate, where we can increase the number of District government workers by requiring more workers to live in the city. That would be a policy that would be phased in, so employees are grandfathered but I want to see an analysis on the best path forward.

2. 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?

Many residents lost their jobs because of the pandemic, and Ward 7 was one of the communities hit the hardest and is having a difficult time recovering. This puts residents at risk of losing their homes, going without food, and unable to take care of their basic needs. In the short-term, we need to invest and expand some of our cash assistance programs, which will get people over the hump. We also need to ensure that the Department of Employment Services has the resources and staff to meet the needs of our unemployed residents. As a long-term solution, we need to expand our vocational programs so that our youth can have multiple options to earn an income. In times like these, having different skillsets will make people more marketable, and that's especially important in a tough economy.