



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: **Nate Fleming**

Current Neighborhood: **Deanwood**

Candidate website: **natefordc.com**

Candidate Twitter: **<https://twitter.com/NateforDC>**

Candidate IG: **NateforDC**

Candidate Facebook: **<https://www.facebook.com/nathanbennettfleming>**

General Questions

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

I was born and raised in Ward 7. I grew up in the Greenway apartments on Minnesota Avenue. Ward 7 is my home and I live in Deanwood now with my wife and twins. I have been trained to become a public servant through my educational pursuits. I attended Morehouse College and then went on to attend law school at the University of California at Berkeley. I also studied at the University of Pennsylvania in pursuit of my doctorate in higher education and I studied public policy at the Harvard University Kennedy School. My educational background has equipped me with the knowledge and skills needed to serve effectively as the Councilmember for Ward 7.

Additionally, I have more than a decade of experience working professionally in the interests of DC residents living East of the River. From 2013-2015, I served as the United States Shadow Representative to Congress for the District of Columbia and I worked at the DC Council as a Legislative Director and as a Committee Director. These experiences have allowed me to gain a deep understanding of the inner workings of the DC Council and will help me to be more effective when I am elected as councilmember.

To make sure that I am able to meet the needs of the residents of Ward 7, I am talking to the residents and leaders of Ward 7 directly. I firmly believe that Ward 7 residents know their needs and how those needs can be met better than anyone else. So far, Ward 7 residents have expressed concerns about public safety, housing affordability, and education. These issues deserve more attention in Ward 7 in particular because Ward 7 is sometimes overlooked when resources are allocated and initiatives are launched.

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?

Along the campaign trail, I have realized that there is great talent in the field. This talent should not be overlooked once one person is elected as councilmember I view my opponents as friends rather than foes. Understanding exactly what it takes to run for office allows me to have great respect for others who select the same path no matter which office they ran for. As councilmember, I will make it a priority to reach out to former candidates to tap their knowledge and expertise in policymaking and community building.

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 councilmember, I will support initiatives to increase funding to Ward 7 schools and create attractive programming in schools, such as programs to allow high school students to take college classes while still in high school and graduate with an Associates degree.

Education is the cornerstone of economic opportunity and social mobility. My vision for education in DC includes universal afterschool programs, expanding youth-based community engagement, and increasing mentorship opportunities, with a strong emphasis on addressing the educational disparities that disproportionately affect Black residents. By integrating mental health services and trauma-informed care into educational settings, my plan acknowledges the complex needs of students and aims to create a supportive learning environment that fosters academic success and personal growth for all.

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?

In my view economic development must be paired with ensuring Ward 7 residents can remain in Ward 7. Ward 7 residents deserve to be able to dine at restaurants, shop in retail venues, and handle business matters within their own Ward 7. My plan for economic revitalization of Ward 7 includes restaurant incubators, grants to entrepreneurs, and zoning reforms. It also includes property tax revisions and rent control to ensure Ward 7 residents will be able to remain in their homes once economic development takes hold.

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?

My homeownership plan includes an outreach and capacity-building program to promote homeownership for Ward 7 residents and residents East of the River. This program will emphasize financial literacy, asset accumulation, and credit counseling, aiming to prepare residents for homeownership through down payment assistance and other supports. Regarding the HPAP program, the “first come first serve” distribution requirements should be revised to ensure funds are not immediately exhausted and funding for the program should be reconsidered to meet increasing demand for homeownership.

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?

Risk Factors and Factors that Reduce Violence:

Risk Factors for Violence

High Concentration of Poverty

Communities that have high concentration of poverty and unemployment are likely to deal with violent crimes at a higher rate, which increases the risk of violence for neighboring residents. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased unemployment rates in Washington, DC and especially in Ward 8, which has exacerbated the issue.

Exposure to Trauma and Violence

Factors that Reduce Violence

Economic Stability

Availability of quality employment options and skill building trainings, access to capital, and opportunities to earn a living wage can help stabilize the economic structure in many communities, promoting healthy living and wellness, and decreasing rates of poverty.

Access to Comprehensive Support Services

Exposure to violence or other traumatic experiences, especially during childhood, can have significant long-term developmental effects. Exposure to trauma increases the likelihood of perpetuating or being victimized by violence in the future. Traumatic experiences can have a negative impact on the person's life, including their ability to focus, maintain a job or relationships, or meaningfully participate in society.

Higher proportions of trauma-informed support services in communities at highest risk of violence have been shown to be vital in improving life outcomes, including decreased exposure to violence. The impact of trauma can be mitigated in part by offering pathways to healing and more fruitful opportunities. People who have direct access to resources and tools that are necessary to cope with trauma are more likely to find alternatives to behaviors that may lead to violence.

Unsafe Community Environment

Residents of communities that have high crime rates, an active drug trade, easy access to firearms, and/or strained relationships with law enforcement are at increased risk of violence. Communities that lack investment or opportunities to form connections with neighbors can also experience an escalation in violence.

Enhanced Positive Community Connections

Enhanced positive connections, involvement, and cohesion in one's community may increase overall safety. Furthermore, communities with decreased proximity to firearms may experience decreased rates of gun violence.

Physically and Financially Unstable Housing

Housing instability, insecurity, and lack of affordability has a significant impact on risk of violence as reliable and cost-effective living is a necessity to maintaining a safe and healthy space to live and thrive. With the advent of gentrification, this issue has been exacerbated by a decrease of affordable and public housing, which has contributed to segregation, displacement, and unstable communities.

Access to Stable and Affordable Housing

Access to safe, stable, and affordable housing can increase the quality of life for individuals and communities and enhance the connection between individuals and their communities. Improving housing standards and options can work to decrease high rates of violence.

Lack of Social Networks and Support Systems

Negative peer relations, including being bullied, being socially isolated, or having a social circle that engages in delinquent, illegal, or violent activities can increase one's risk for violence. The social isolation can also result in individuals seeking out negative peer networks, such as neighborhood-based crews. The isolation and lack of in-person peer interactions due to government shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue. In addition, prior contact or involvement in the legal system can prevent many from creating positive social networks and support systems.

Lack of Quality Healthcare Services

The Ward 8 community suffers from a lack of access to healthcare, including having just one hospital and not enough mental health facilities. This prevents people from having a direct connection to necessary care after experiencing illness or injury and makes it difficult for those who need care to seek it. When physical and mental health conditions go untreated and undiagnosed, it deteriorates community health overall and can lead to an increase in violence in the community.

Lack of Quality Educational Resources and Activities

Positive Social Networks and Support Systems

Involvement in strong social peer groups that avoid violent behavior can lead to greater stability, as can having mentor-protege relationships that can serve as both a space of enhancing positive interpersonal development and further exposure to new and positive opportunities.

Access to Quality Healthcare Services

Access to various quality healthcare services and treatments can promote healthy living and wellness. In addition, an increase in hospitals and other medical care treatment centers, especially centered around behavioral and mental health, can promote a higher standard of life for communities and neighborhoods.

Access to Quality Educational Options

Lack of access to quality educational options and disengagement in school and extracurricular activities correlate with increased risk for violence. Lack of education can limit access to jobs, living wages and other resources, which may be associated with involvement in engaging in illegal activities for profit and potential violence.

Access to quality educational options, activities, and resources, along with strong connection and relationship building between students, teachers, counselors, and administrators can improve stability and culture. This access can provide students with necessary skills, abilities, and spaces to have positive and healthy life outcomes.

Negative Household Environment and Family Relationships

These risk factors can contribute to low levels of family involvement or support, neglect, or abuse, which can have long-lasting negative developmental effects. Many additional household environment factors such as a family member's involvement in the legal system or having parents with low education levels can also affect risk level for violence, which contributes to emotional, financial, and community instability.

Positive Family Structures and Relationships

Nurturing and secure family structures and relationships are vital to decreasing the risk of violence in communities. Families can provide the personal and emotional support needed for people, especially for those dealing with trauma, to lead healthy lives. It helps maintain positive connection to their communities and creates safe spaces for expression and development. The definition of "family" can include not just biological, but also neighbors, mentors, peers, teachers, and other trusted and supportive community members.

Systemic Racism

Equity-Focused Investments

Systemic racism is at the center of various issues that affect Ward 8 as seen through many issues, such as disproportionately high incarceration rates, slow service response times by police, concentrated areas of high poverty, and lack of quality education. The historical context of systemic racism plays a vital role in the disengagement and lack of access to many important resources needed in communities like Ward 8 and play an overarching role in the aspects that cause violence in communities.

Investments into communities that are focused on equity can be key to providing a better overall community and works to fix the inequities due to structural racism and discrimination. These investments on a program, community or individual level can enhance the stability of those directly impacted and can be targeted to meet the specific needs of those that it encounters. Further investment, be it financial or programmatic, can decrease violence by offering more opportunities and more concern to the well-being and development of the community and its stakeholders.

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

Bridging the gap between the community and law enforcement is crucial in ensuring public safety. DC maintains a Police Complaints Board (PCB), which oversees the Office of Police Complaints (OPC) and is empowered to conduct periodic reviews and make recommendations to the Mayor, the Council, and the Chiefs of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and DC Housing Authority's Office of Public Safety (OPS). I recognize the importance of the PCB and will enhance and increase the responsibilities of the board to better improve of the citizen complaint process or elements of the two police departments' recruitment, training, evaluation, discipline, and supervision of police officers.

We plan to increase intervention activities that focus on interrupting the cycle of violence and focusing on those who are at highest risk of violence either as a perpetrator or a victim and including those who are returning from incarceration. A comprehensive street outreach network and victim support network are key elements of intervention. We want to include key intervention practices such as behavioral health services, living wage jobs, and most importantly, relentless engagement with those who are at the highest risk of violence involvement, all of which can support them in living safe and productive lives.

Increase a relationship-based approach to policing

Relationship-based policing that sees community as true partners in crafting safety is necessary to build trust and ultimately strengthens police legitimacy which in turn contributes to reducing violence. From responding to violent incidents to solving crime, effective policing is rooted in community-police partnership. While each neighborhood is unique in its combination of assets and needs, which requires a tailored approach, each of the four key components must be present at a scale that meets the needs of the community. To reach scale, each component must be available and accessible for each and every neighborhood impacted by violence. This plan points out ways in which all public, private, and community stakeholders and resources must be organized and mobilized to bring change. It is a call to action that we must set aside our differences and find ways to connect and seek solutions. Nothing less than an “all hands on deck” effort will bring peace to the streets, hope for our children, and a brighter future for the ward.

Increase opportunities for DC born residents to serve in Metropolitan Police Department

A key element of increasing relational policing in the District can be met if we increase opportunities for DC born residents and residents from communities at risk of violence can serve as members of the MPD. We currently have the cadet program that we suggest should be doubled and the investments into high school cadet programs must be fully funded and realized.

Increase capacity and service quality of gun violence, domestic violence, diversion, and victim services programs

- Building on best practices and coordinating with street outreach services, we must invest \$1.5 million in developing a network of trauma-informed victim services organizations to ensure individuals impacted by violence have access to resources and supports they need.
- Street outreach expansion and capacity building for smaller community-based organizations.
- Create an RFP for an opportunity to fund up several organizations to expand access to high-quality, trauma-informed mental health services in communities of high need.

- Expand opportunities for youth-designed programs and campaigns, and youth-led advocacy related to gun violence and domestic violence.
- Improve and expand the support services to which youth are connected at Department of Youth and Rehabilitation Services (DYRS)
- Expand investments in violence prevention services to ensure that the footprint of violence interventions in the community match the scale and scope of the problem and need.
- Current diversion programs should be streamlined and coordinated so that residents with severe mental health challenges can be identified to inform the response to incidents in which these residents are involved in.

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.

I understand the importance of accessible and efficient public transportation services in Ward 7. When elected, I will advocate for the expansion of key bus routes in Ward 7 to enable residents to get to work and school in the most efficient manner.

We also need to promote safe driving and fewer pedestrian casualties in the ward. I envision Ward 7 as a ward with zero traffic fatalities and I support measures to prevent drivers from driving at dangerous speeds through our communities. Crosswalks in the ward should be better maintained and drivers should always stop at crosswalks for pedestrians. Road maintenance projects in Ward 7 should be completed in a timely manner and in a way that minimizes disruption to the general flow of traffic. I also support identifying flaws in transportation infrastructure and repairing them efficiently and effectively.

Health & Human Services

What are the biggest health and human services challenges that you see facing Ward 7 residents?

Ward 7 residents have a shorter life expectancy and poorer overall health outcomes than DC residents West of the Park. Our challenges relate to both physical and mental

health. Physical health challenges include lack of access to quality health care and lack of access to healthy food options. We also struggle with higher rates of disease, maternal and infant mortality, and opioid abuse. Mental health challenges can be compounded by the stress of trying to thrive in an unequal playing field.

As Ward 7 Councilmember, what specific measures and/or initiatives would you champion to improve health outcomes of Ward 7 residents?

As councilmember, I will work to bring more healthy eating options to Ward 7, including grocery stores and restaurants. Being able to easily access fruits, vegetables, and other fresh foods is essential to healthy outcomes for Ward 7 residents.

Older adults facing health problems may encounter difficulties navigating Medicare and Medicaid programs. Organizations that provide supportive services to older adults need more funding to reach more individuals and expanded programming to ensure older adults are assisted through every step of accessing healthcare when necessary.

Mental health services need to be integrated into afterschool programs. These services should be offered in community centers, recreation centers, and churches, emphasizing a youth engagement-driven network of providers. The DC government should expand access to high-quality, trauma-informed mental health services in communities of high need. This includes developing a network of organizations and facilitating citywide commitment to planning and coordination in preventing and reducing violence.