



### 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: [Ebony Payne](#)

Current Neighborhood: [Kingman Park](#)

Candidate website: [www.ebonypayneforward7.com](http://www.ebonypayneforward7.com)

Candidate Twitter: [N/A](#)

Candidate IG: [@ebonypayneforward7](#)

Candidate Facebook: [Ebony Payne for Ward 7 | Facebook](#) or [Facebook.com/61553582067953](https://www.facebook.com/61553582067953)

Other social media:

#### **General Questions**

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

I am the best candidate for Ward 7 DC Council because **my experience extends beyond my political advocacy work as an ANC Commissioner**. I am the only candidate in the race with a background in health and wellness who **understands how to improve the health outcomes** of our residents. I am the only candidate who **knows how to run a successful business** and the many challenges that our small business owners face. I am also the only candidate who not only brings **teaching experience** but is **ready to harness a wide network of local farmers who are ready to solve our food desert!**

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?

**Communication and respect is the foundation of any healthy relationship.** In my capacity as an ANC Commissioner, I have been in the position of representing a community that has often been at odds with the Mayor's priorities and goals. **I understand how important it is to foster a healthy dialogue where the community's voice is able to be heard so that their concerns are met.** I have built many positive working relationships with our Mayor and Councilmembers including At-Large members, and those who border us in Ward 5, Ward 6, and Ward 8 because **we share many of the same issues around crime and public safety, food access issues, and an overall lack of city services.** I respect my opponents in the Ward 7 DC Council race and trust our democratic process will provide voters with the opportunity to determine who is the best candidate to represent them. **I am focused on making the lives of Ward 7 residents better and thus harbor no ill will towards my opponents.**

### **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 former Ward 7 student who had to commute an hour across town to access a quality school, this issue is very personal. Our goal should be to make it possible for students to safely walk to their neighborhood school. Ward 7 schools have historically been at a severe disadvantage due to long standing issues of generational poverty and disinvestment. The pandemic exacerbated these issues and our **chronic truancy and absentee rates have significantly risen which is one of the root causes of our spike in juvenile crime.** We must get our kids back into school so that they are not exposed to the worst elements of society. **Children who are experiencing homelessness and who are in the foster care system are two demographics at the highest risk of being absent from school.** I would focus on reaching these students and providing them with social services including housing, mentoring, transportation, and other monetary support.

**Our school system has failed students with learning and physical disabilities** which is evident in the class action lawsuit against OSSE for failure to provide adequate transportation services. This is also an underlying factor in our chronic truancy rates because students who are picked up late miss hours of learning time they can never get back. **We need to hire more bus drivers** and target Ward 7 residents for these jobs. We must work to **reduce class sizes, increase funding to pay our teachers more, and hire disability education specialists who can provide in-classroom support.** These measures will support students who are struggling to read, write,

and understand math at grade level to make up for pandemic era learning loss which has impacted an entire generation of students. We also need to **implement Universal Pre-K** to give young learners the best chance of success in their academic careers.

**Expanding language learning opportunities and cultural exchanges** will help open up new possibilities for our student's futures and give them a competitive edge in the job market. As someone who benefited greatly from attending a vocational program which gave me the ability to immediately start my own business and support myself, I will work to **expand vocational and skills based learning, encourage entrepreneurship**, and give our children a foundation to be self-sufficient. Solving our food desert is a major focus of mine and we can start by providing **gardening education** to teach students how to grow their own food, prepare healthy meals, understand our food system, and be long term agents of change in solving our food desert.

### **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?

**Creating jobs is an essential part of solving poverty and reducing crime.** My primary focus in my first term will be to create jobs in the food sector by expanding the availability of healthier food options including **more grocery stores, farmers markets, and promoting the establishment of food businesses such as coffee shops and restaurants.** Currently, the only consistent farmers market in Ward 7 lies west of the Anacostia River and occurs only once every Saturday on the RFK Campus. This is an important resource for seniors and low income residents to access fresh, healthy food but we need to expand options East of the River. **Farmers markets are a great short term solution to our food desert** that can quickly be up and running all over the Ward. The long term solution is to **require developers to include grocery stores as anchors in their housing development plans.**

**Ward 7 can be a leader of entrepreneurship through the creation of a small business incubator space.** This type of initiative will provide an opportunity for those who are looking to start their own businesses with space to work, meet with their teams, manufacture their products, and have a central location to learn about funding and grant opportunities.

It is essential to **expand vocational education in our schools** so that our children not only have the best chance of being competitive in the job market, but can start their own businesses creating all kinds of services our communities need. **Everyone should have a trade they can fall back on at any time.** This is key to long term financial freedom and economic success.

## **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?

**Homeownership is not only the foundation of stability and growth for families but the primary way to build generational wealth.** I support increasing funding for the Housing Purchase Assistance Program and reversing the distribution requirements to more equitably serve residents. **Financial literacy classes, including budgeting, mortgage management, and understanding credit, needs to accompany funding for all first time homebuyers.** As Councilwoman, my housing initiatives will include **supporting longtime Ward 7 families through property tax relief** that ensures they are not pushed out of our city due to increased property taxes.

Many Ward 7 residents live in housing units in which their landlords are failing to maintain and keep clean and free from mold and rats. **Protections for tenants and holding landlords accountable** is essential to ensuring families who are not yet in a position to be homeowners are still able to live in dignity. **Landlords who are issued fines should pay a portion of those fees directly to the tenants who have been harmed.** Tenants should have the first **Right to Purchase** the homes they are renting if the property is put up for sale. I also support **fully funding our Emergency Rental Assistance Program** to prevent families from being evicted from their homes.

Finally, we need to **require developers to include grocery stores into their housing plans** and encourage mixed income housing that supports residents who are low and middle income as well as **workforce financial assistance to encourage homeownership amongst educators, first responders, and veterans.**

## **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?

While Ward 7 has had long standing issues with crime, our most recent spike has been driven by **juvenile crime, carjackings, robberies, and rampant retail theft which is making it difficult for our businesses to stay in business.** This threatens our economic stability for many reasons including residents leaving the city which decreases our tax base and harms our

ability to fund social programs, jobs being lost due to businesses closing, and the few grocery stores we have access to shuttering their doors.

**We need a holistic approach to public safety that upholds justice for victims of crime and accountability for anyone who breaks our laws, especially violent, repeat, and sex offenders.** For juvenile crime, we need to **rapidly reduce our chronic truancy rates** and get our kids back into school. My focus will be on removing their idle time through the creation of **robust after school programming that promotes vocational training, youth sports leagues, arts, and other creative outlets.** We need to reactivate and **expand the summer youth jobs programs for teens.**

I support filling the current vacancies in MPD that are the result of a high amount of retirements with candidates who have grown up in DC by **encouraging high school students to enroll in MPD's Cadet program and putting an emphasis on hiring more Black women police officers.** We need to strengthen community-police relations and partner with faith based organizations to foster a healthy dialogue between police and the public they are tasked to protect and serve. I support funding for **Violence Interrupters and Safe Passage for schools** as part of our crime prevention efforts and would work to better integrate into our local political structure including at the ANC level for better communication and mutual support.

### **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.

The biggest transportation obstacle for Ward 7 residents is dealing with the Department of Transportation itself. Our requests are often left ignored and decisions are made without proper community input. **Simple requests such as speed humps take years to implement** and there is a general lack of consideration to listening and meeting the needs of the community. **Strict oversight is needed over DDOT** and transportation solutions that meet the needs of seniors and disabled residents is a matter of civil rights.

Currently, senior transportation is handled under the Department of Aging and Community Living which I believe is one of the root causes of DDOT's failure to create a transportation system that works for those with mobility issues. **I would move senior transportation under DDOT so that the whole agency is required to design with disabled residents in mind.** I would also **repeal our ROSA law** which allows cars with out of state license plates to park for months on our streets often in front of senior homes.

**Aggressive drivers** who speed on our roads and endanger our citizens need to be held accountable and taken off the streets. **While I am in favor of the DC Streetcar extension, it would make much more sense if it connected residents who live near Fletcher Johnson and the Maryland border** which would give them free and direct access to the RFK Campus

and all the grocery stores and restaurants along the H street corridor. Both residents and business owners who are impacted along Benning Road should be given **tax or other monetary compensation for the disruption construction would cause and all Ward 7 residents should be given priority for the jobs created** including during construction and once the system is complete. I would also increase funding to **expand the Circulator bus routes and design a bus network that centers access to grocery stores and schools.**

### **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?

**One of the root causes of poor health outcomes for Ward 7 residents is living in a food desert** which is why solving this problem will be my primary focus in my first term. A healthy diet is the foundation of a healthy life. The few grocery stores that do exist usually feel unsafe to shop in and the available food products are often expired. We need more healthy food options and we need to incentivize businesses to provide them through grants and/or tax breaks.

We must also **focus our attention on improving maternal health outcomes** which are currently some of the worst in the country. **Ward 7 needs a quality maternal hospital** so that new and expecting mothers do not have to travel across the city just to access maternal health care. An emphasis should be put on the quality of care because the health clinics that currently serve us often have 1 star reviews, terribly slow service, and doctors who are biased and do not care about the well being of our community.

**Many of our residents are silently struggling with addictions including from alcohol, opioids, fentanyl, and methamphetamines. While Ward 7 only has three grocery stores, we have countless liquor stores.** This is by design and must be eradicated. We need to provide more funding for the Department of Behavioral Health and provide access to drug treatment centers for those who need **mental health support.**

Finally, the **persistent gun violence that plagues our communities is a public health crisis** and presents one of the most fatal health challenges our families face. Even if someone is not murdered by gun violence, if they are victims of gun violence in any way they will struggle with life long trauma and physical disabilities. **We must take gun violence prevention seriously, and speak to our youth early about how to channel their energy in a way that is positive and healthy.**