

MEMPHIS CITY COUNCIL QUESTIONNAIRE 2007

NAME: BILL MORRISON

1. Please describe your background and your qualifications for this position? What experiences caused you to run for this office? What unique qualities would you bring to this position and what differentiates you from other candidates in your race?

I have lived in Memphis for over 30 years and have been involved in the community for much of that time. My entire adult working life has been spent serving people through my extensive involvement with non profits, as a homeowner's association board member, and as a teacher. I have seen this city change over the years and can directly relate those changes to district 1 because I have lived in Frayser and Raleigh for the majority of my time in Memphis. As a graduate of the University of Memphis I have not only experienced our local state university but I attended both city and county schools as a child. I spent time at Southwest Community College and have a wide range of experiences when it comes to addressing the needs of our city. I have worked for K Mart in my younger days and spent time with Guardsmark as I worked my way through college. I understand the difficulties facing all of us as we look for jobs to better ourselves and our families, I have been there.

Most people may remember me as a United States congressional candidate for District 7 this past year. We worked hard in that election and were very proud of the job we did. Even though the result did not come out the way we had hoped, it certainly provided me an opportunity to really share my ideas with so many people. Over the months that followed the election I continued to talk about problems facing our city, and people began to encourage me to run for city council. In April of this year, I made the decision to run to help bring new ideas to our city. We have spent too long tearing down our city over issues of race that we have forgotten that we all face issues that should untie us as Memphians. We all want to do better for ourselves and our families, we all want to know our neighborhoods are safe, and that our children have the best opportunities we can provide for them. Because of these issues, I offer myself to serve District 1 and be a voice for everyone.

I believe that in life, we all have those moments that change who we might become. For some it is a teacher or pastor that gives advice, for others it is a result of a decision made. I too had a moment in the early 1990's when I was working for K Mart. I was involved in an accident that resulted in me losing the lower part of my left leg. That day changed my life for all the right reasons. It taught me to look past the surface of people and to really understand what they are saying. It provided the patience to understand that everyone can succeed if given just the chance. It reminds me to never give up on anything or anyone. Yes, Memphis does have problems but these problems can all be solved when we come together with one common goal and work together to make Memphis great.

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2. What is your vision for the City? How would you use this office to achieve the vision?

My vision, and what I hope will become the vision of all Memphians, is to once again see the city of Memphis as a leader and not a follower among major cities in our region as well as the Country. We must work hard to bring Memphis back to the top in regards to economic development, education, and quality of life. All three of these items can be dealt with in some regards as a member of the city council. All three items are tied together and in working to improve one we must work to improve all three.

The opportunities for Memphis are incredible and must be used to promote new jobs in growth sectors such as, Bio-science, Logistics, Film & Music and Tourism, and also to help recruit new business to our city. While doing this, we must also offer continued support to small business in our neighborhoods. The council must also begin to look at the development of the region. Memphis is surrounded by fast growing areas that are just now beginning to see the effects of their population increase and Memphis can work with these areas to promote economic development for the region.

Memphis certainly faces several challenges but I believe there is none greater than poverty. The council must work with both profit and non profit companies to begin to address the problem of poverty in our city. This will certainly not be easy, but must be done if we are to take on crime, promote economic development, emphasize education, and improve the quality of life in our city. Poverty must be seen as a major issue that creates by-products such as crime, high infant mortality rates, and the urban plight that we have witnessed in Memphis. Without a serious look into this problem, I believe we are missing an opportunity to really make a difference in the lives of all Memphians.

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3. How do you plan on insuring that there is diversity, (including race, age, gender and socio-economic) represented in the development of public policy and government?

Diversity should be celebrated not feared by our City. As a middle school teacher you are obligated to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and given the same opportunities no matter what their background. I believe that should also be the case in government. We need to embrace the fact that our backgrounds are different and come together as Memphians working for a better place for all of us to live. Everyone has something to offer to the discussion and should be heard and not ignored because of race, age, gender, or socio-economic background.

As the council begins to develop policy we should move to institute a policy that requires diversity in the people nominated for appointed boards and commissions. We must also respect the history and culture of all Memphians and give serious consideration to those factors as we make policy for Memphis. We must strive to reflect the culture of Memphis and continue to work with all Memphians in reaching the goals set forth by the council. In every case the council should bridge the gaps to help promote and understand mutual respect between the government and the people we are elected to serve.

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4. What are the three greatest issues facing the City of Memphis today and during the future?

- 1) Economic Development
- 2) Education
- 3) Quality of Life

Economic Development – The city council can play a crucial role in this regard by showing that as a body we support the economic development of our city. We must reach out to existing companies and have an open conversation about the pros and cons of business development in our communities. We then must follow through and try to correct the areas that must change. The small business owner here in our city needs to also be brought in to the discussion and the needs of small business must be heard. When possible, we should work hard to build up these businesses because they will only grow and make Memphis stronger. The council must also work to promote tourism and help local agencies attract conventions and other functions that would bring increase revenue to the city. We should also begin to work to eliminate poverty in our city and these economic development plans will be crucial to seeing that problem resolved.

Education – Though the city council has very little control over this area we must work with our city school system to help ensure that the workforce needed by companies is being provided by our public school system. We need to encourage more partnerships with local businesses and our school system to help identify areas that will have substantial job growth, and ensure that our school system is preparing our young people for the future. We must also look at the impact that local non profits can have in this area in helping to reach our young people and ensuring that they know where to go to find the help necessary to be successful in school.

Quality of Life – We all want to live in a city that is clean, crime free, and provides opportunities for everyone to enjoy our city. With these ideas in mind we must work with communities to help reduce the crime rate in our city. Our city must work as one to reduce the infant mortality and ensure that our children have a bright future in Memphis. We must work with industries to help clean our air and promote a greener city. Strict code and ordinance enforcement to help prevent our neighborhoods from becoming over run with poor managed properties must be used to help communities reach their vision of a warm and beautiful neighborhood. As a council we should look elsewhere such as Denver and Seattle to see how those communities are using light rail systems and other means of public transportation to help every Memphian enjoy their hometown even if they do not have a car. This will also involve working with MATA to ensure the needs of our communities are being met with the service they provide. All these components work as one and as we come together and work to improve these areas, we are working to make Memphis great

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5. What role should the City of Memphis government play in promoting the economic development for the community? What specific initiatives or actions would you promote and/or support?

The council can play a major role in the economic development of our communities by first creating an atmosphere of trust between the government and business operators. The role of the council should not be one of adversary but one who welcomes the feedback from the community and will work to address the concerns of not only current but potential opportunities for the city. The council must certainly look at the PILOT program and review the impact that it has created for the city. The current tax structure is not considered favorable for economic development in our city and I believe the council has a responsibility to look at the needs of the community and decide how best to promote the economic development of our city.

The council would also do well to begin to look at the opportunities for economic development not only for the city of Memphis but as the leader of this region. To do these things we must first ensure that we can provide an adequate workforce to any potential client interested in our city. Furthermore, we must go beyond just words and really look into where we can attract the best paying jobs to our city and what fits the needs of this region. Bringing business to Memphis is crucial but we must not settle for the \$7.00 an hour job. We must work hard to win the trust of the business community and establish open lines of communication with all interested parties.

The council should begin immediate work to create a comprehensive strategic economic development plan that looks at the four areas of strength within the Memphis Economy Bio-Science, Logistics, Film and Music, and Tourism. We should also work to provide funding for marketing Memphis outside the city to prospective companies. We can achieve these goals but certainly we must also look at home and work to remove the barriers so small businesses can start working in the communities, but we must help them succeed by offering support services to grow small businesses into larger ones. Make sure that we are growing minority owned business by requiring partnerships between larger companies and minority ones in government funded projects.

MEMPHIS CITY COUNCIL QUESTIONNAIRE 2007

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6. How would you strengthen and support existing neighborhoods that are within the urban core and what barriers to community redevelopment do you see in these areas today? How do you propose to address the current blight in many of these areas?

Let me first say that I am not confident that the city of Memphis works hard enough to promote the opportunities within these neighborhoods. The city must be open to ideas that may not fit the norm and truly listen to what people have to say in regards to the redevelopment of these communities. We must look at affordable housing, small business operations, as well as what the city can do to help promote these communities to the existing business owners and prospective business development in our city. We need to ensure that current services provided by Memphis are available and the community is aware of these services so they can not only ask for help but take the responsibility to help redevelop their community, with the council as a partner in the project. The idea that success breeds success is true and we will see that effect with these types of projects. When the council can establish that we are serious about solving the urban blight problem, then and only then will communities join with us to help make Memphis great.

In Memphis we already have in place several crucial elements to help win this fight. Community Development Corps. (CDC's) are essential in the redeveloping of communities in Memphis. As a council member I feel we should make it a top priority to help CDC's with there limited funding issues and we need to help the CDC's with acquiring land, some type of joint land bank between the city and the county would be a great starting point. This is an area where we need to focus on code enforcement issues and help communities clean up their areas.

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NAME: BILL MORRISON

7. What do regard as the greatest obstacle or barrier to growth in the City today?

The current tax structure is not considered favorable for economic development in our city. I believe the council has a responsibility to look at the needs of the community and decide how best to promote the economic development opportunities. Over reliance on the PILOT program has not allowed Memphis to grow its business tax base, so we must review not only the PILOT program, but also how we can work to help promote economic development and not place an unfair tax burden on businesses wishing to relocate to Memphis.

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8. Give us your thoughts on the Charter Commission. What are the main issues that should be taken into consideration by this group and what items in the City Charter should be considered for change? Please comment specifically on your ideas around consolidation and/or a metropolitan government.

I believe consolidation is by no means a fix all. The current status of our school system should tell us that bigger may not always be better. Yes, consolidation would certainly help with administrative budgets, but outside of that consolidation would be a major change and I would like to see the data on the possible efficiencies or inefficiencies. Also I would like to see how consolidation has affected other peer cities. Until then we are only guessing based on perception and not making inform decision which as a councilman I would be elected to do. I do certainly believe that the City and County should work together for the mutual benefit of both, and when taxpayers can be relieved of some government expense then we should act in the best interest of the tax payer.

MEMPHIS CITY COUNCIL QUESTIONNAIRE 2007

NAME: BILL MORRISON

9. What is the role of this office? What do you think about the relationship between the City Mayor/City Council and other legislative bodies, Shelby County, Memphis City Schools, MLG&W, Chamber, Center City Commission, etc.

We must establish a strong, trustworthy relationship with each of the organizations mentioned. As a council member we should work hard as leaders working together for the betterment of not only Memphis but also the region. We must also bring more groups to the table and seek input from those who work every day to help make Memphis great. Memphis is blessed with resources within our non profit communities. We need to work with and not against these organizations to build bridges between groups and neighborhoods so all Memphians can benefit from this work. The council serves the people of their district and Memphis as a whole. I believe the idea of serving has been absent too long and we need to get our government back on track and serving the needs of all Memphians.

MEMPHIS CITY COUNCIL QUESTIONNAIRE 2007

NAME: BILL MORRISON

10. How would you, as a member of the City Council, effectively reduce the crime rate in the City of Memphis? What current strategies would you continue to support and what changes would you propose?

The council must begin with an open dialogue with the police department and assess the direction of our police department. This can begin by asking for a plan of action to reduce crime in Memphis. The council must help achieve the goals set forth by our police, but we must have a clear understanding of the needs and expected results within a set time. I am in favor of the state of the art crime center we are creating that's smaller but similar to the one in NY. The continuation of blue crush I feel is crucial in our fight on crime. Effective crime fighting is crucial in developing the quality of life that all Memphians want. I also believe that within this we must enforce our current codes and help these neighborhoods win back their streets.

I believe the "broken window" approach that was so successful in New York should be looked at to see if such a program could work here in Memphis. With this program even the smallest thing like a broken window when reported by a resident, was dealt with quickly. The idea was if you see a broken window today, tomorrow you will see two and so forth. The idea being that once a house or abandon building was seen as ignored, the criminal element would move in. With this policy the opportunity does not exist for the criminal element to move in.

I also support a strong re-entry program in our jails. We must work with the county to ensure that those who have paid their debt to society are given every opportunity to once again become successful members of our communities. We must do this through life skills training and a strong focus on a GED program. Workforce development is essential in providing skills training and working with the business community/ HR departments to not rule out people with records to provide second chance jobs.

MEMPHIS CITY COUNCIL QUESTIONNAIRE 2007

NAME: BILL MORRISON

11. In light of recent events, would you be willing to submit to a background check and then allow the results to be published?

Throughout my adult life I have been subject to background checks in just about every job I have ever held and would not hesitate in submitting to one and making any relevant information public.

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12. Discuss the recently passed ethics ordinance/policy at the State and local levels? Is this sufficient and if not, what changes would you recommend?

This is certainly an issue that many voters are extremely passionate about. I, like so many others, find it hard to believe some of the issues we have seen occur lately with our elected officials. With that said, I would ask that the city attorney to provide the council with the legal brief on what exactly the council can do in regards to any member that violates the ethics code. This is one issue I believe the council should look at quickly and should lead the state in cleaning up government. Memphis has certainly received a black eye as of late but the new council will have an opportunity to set a new direction and a new tone for Memphis politics.

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13. Should the City Council Committee and full Council Meetings be video cast live?

I support any initiative that would bring the community and the council closer together. We must work hard to win the trust back from those who we wish to represent. It is time for serious people to begin to work on serious issues in our city. We need the people to once again believe that we are here to serve them.