

Coalition for a Better Memphis Candidate Questionnaire Memphis City Council

Bill Morrison – District 1

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 almost 33 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 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. Because of these experiences I decided to run for City Council and was honored to be elected by the people of district 1. I have worked tirelessly over the last three and a half years to make sure that I am available to all my constituents and love listening to their ideas and working to form the partnerships to help make our City great.

Over the past three and a half years I have talked about problems facing our city, and worked to find solutions not only through government but by working with the community based groups who spend their days working to better our communities. I have served as budget committee chair and have worked my way up to vice-chairman of the city council because I have worked to form partnerships and find compromise to help drive the issues facing this City forward. I made the decision to run for re-election to continue the work that I have started and to ensure that not only district 1 but the City continues to move forward and face these tough economic issues and challenges head on. We have worked hard to make positive changes not only in district 1 but the City and now is not the time to let up. We must continue to work on stricter code enforcement and as I worked to help pass the new unified development code that was a major concern that we see good development in Memphis and really work to stop the sprawl that hurts our inner core. I have shown that I will not back away from the tough issues as I wrote new laws limiting the expansion of title loan businesses that target our hardest hit communities, and sponsored a living wage ordinance that would provide a fair wage to all those who work for the city government. But most importantly I have been an advocate for my district and available to everyone. I have

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

been blessed to serve this district and look forward to continuing the partnership that I have with my constituents in district.

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

My vision is to ensure that we continue to move Memphis forward as a leader and not a follower among major cities in our region as well as the Country. We must continue to bring Memphis back to the top in regards to economic development by continuing to market Memphis and encourage companies to not only expand here but to move their operations to our city. We have made tremendous strides with economic development and with the creation of the economic developmental growth engine (EDGE) board we have positioned ourselves to continue the aggressive recruitment of companies to come to Memphis and set up their operations. This is all tied to moving Memphis towards becoming a world class city that has strong neighborhoods, a high quality of life, jobs, access to quality education, and a strong environment for business.

Since taking office three and a half years ago, I have taking on the tough issues facing our city. My approach has been simple and effective. Instead of just looking to the government for the same old solutions I have turned to the people that know the issues the best - the community. Working with the community to find solutions has been effective and has led to more people getting involved all working to make Memphis an outstanding place to live. We have passed stricter zoning laws with the unified development code, worked to clean up code enforcement (an ongoing matter) fought for a living wage, focused on preventing urban sprawl which is harmful to our district and our city. I have fought to protect our community from businesses that drag our communities down like title lending businesses and adult oriented establishments. I have supported and will continue to fight to expand the support of established small businesses, as well as, women and minority owned business. Memphis strongest assets are our people and we should work hard to support them in their endeavors. This is why I made the decision to continue to serve the community and run for re-election so I can continue to work with the community to solve our problems. We must ensure that District 1 and the City moves forward and face these tough economic issues and challenges head on.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

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, sexual preference, or socio-economic background.

As a member of this Council I have worked hard to make sure that input is taken from all parties and have always welcomed public input on issues facing this City. Working with the administration on forming study groups and committees that are made up of the diversity that Memphis is so blessed to have. I am fortunate to serve one of the most diverse districts in the city and we have shown what can be done when we all come together. I have supported the ban the box initiative and will fight to see it expanded because we have to reach out to everyone if Memphis is going to continue to move forward. It is also important that we continue to set aside funds that support the development of women and minority businesses and this council has done that and I am going to fight to make sure we continue to do that.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

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

- 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 their public transportation to help every Memphian enjoy their hometown even if they do not have a car. We must work to reform MATA to ensure that needed routes are added and they are efficient. This will also involve working with MATA to ensure the needs of our communities are being met with the service they provide to include the services required by the disabled community. All these components work as one and as we come together and work to improve these areas, we are working to make Memphis great

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

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?

This council has played 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.

This council took action setting up EDGE to help drive the economic development and to work to create a comprehensive strategic economic development plan that looks not only at the four areas of strength within the Memphis Economy Bio-Science, Logistics, Film and Music, and Tourism, but to also breakdown the obstacles for a company who has to work through two governments to achieve their goals of opening in Memphis. This council has also worked to ensure that small businesses can start working in the communities, and can partner with them to help their businesses grow by offering support services to small businesses so they can grow into larger ones. This council has worked to ensure that we are growing women and minority owned business by requiring partnerships between larger companies and minority ones in government funded projects through the bidding process.

During my term I have voted to support the Memphis fast forward economic development plan and the Memphis Chambers initiative to help attract business to our City. I am certainly excited about the Bloomberg grant and the help that my district will gain with the initiatives that it will help fund with its core city economic development as a focus area. I am also very proud of voting to put in place Community LIFT as a blue print to the way we need to focus on bringing back our communities.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

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?

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. This council has worked hard with several communities forming partnerships to help them receive funds to help the community work to solve the issues that face them.

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 made it a top priority to help CDC's with their limited funding issues to help the CDC's with acquiring land because of this the joint land bank between the city and the county now works closely to help the communities take back their neighborhoods by deeding the land to the CDC's. This is an area where we need to continue our focus with code enforcement issues and help communities keep their areas clean. By adopting the Greater Memphis Neighborhoods Plan, we will have in a place a comprehensive plan to bring our neighborhoods back.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

7. What do you 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 and is looked at as a negative by companies wishing to relocate to our City. This council voted to set up the joint EDGE board to help promote economic development and to help streamline the process that many companies find very difficult to navigate because of having to deal with two governments. Those two issues, taxes and the process together, present a huge barrier for companies looking at Memphis as a potential relocation site. The process that a company has to go through is very long and time consuming when companies want answers to their questions. This is one of the main reasons the EDGE was created by taking the feedback from all the stakeholders and developing a plan to help promote economic growth by streamlining the process and resources that are required to attract companies to Memphis.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

8. What is the role of the City Council? What do you think about the relationship between the Council and the City Mayor; as well as other elected or appointed bodies, such as: Shelby County Commissioners, State of Tennessee Shelby County Delegation, MLGW, Greater Memphis Chamber, Downtown Memphis Commission, etc.

This council has established a strong working relationship with each of the organizations mentioned. As a council member I have worked hard to form a personal relationship with the leaders of the organizations which allows me to be a stronger advocate not only for my district but for the City. Certainly it is not possible to get along all the time but as the leaders of the city we have to work together and compromise for the betterment of everyone.

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 nonprofit 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 have worked hard to make myself available to my constituents and to ensure them that they have a voice at City Hall.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

9. With regard to the crime rate, what current strategies would you support and what changes would you propose if any?

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. As a member of the council I have continued to support blue crush and to work with the precincts in the district to ensure their needs are being addressed by the administration. I believe this type of partnership is why we have seen the crime rate drop in the city. As the crime rate continues to drop blight has become a top concern and needs to be dealt with head on. A key element to this I feel will be to re-examine the role our police can play to help bring back our neighborhoods. Certainly blue crush will remain but it is time to look at community policing and the impact it could have on communities as we try to help each community take back their neighborhoods.

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 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

10. 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.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

11. Do you support the local ethics ordinance? Is the Ordinance sufficient, and if not, what changes would you recommend?

Yes, I do support the local ethics ordinance and am very proud to say that as a member of the council, I voted to establish the committee. I have worked to ensure it is not only funded but remains independent from any government body. Currently, we have a strong ordinance but I would be open to improvements if it became clear that there was an issue that created problems with the committee performing its duties.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

12. What are your ideas with regards to the City's responsibility for funding Memphis City Schools?

The city council is responsible for maintaining the maintenance of effort (MOE) for the city schools as long as they are in existence. As a council we have no ability to amend the city schools budget so the role we should play is to ensure the student population is reported correctly and then using the formula make sure we fund the MOE for the city school system. Until Judge Mays hands down a ruling the city will fund the schools as required by the courts decisions.

This council in the past has supported the approach of approving grants for the school system and I think this is the part where we can play a more effective role then what we do now. With the approach of single source funding this should become a role the council reviews as we move towards a unified school system, while protecting the city taxpayer from being double taxed. Previously the council funded the summer reading program which had measurable goals and a specific program that was certainly needed for our young people, this is a great example of what we can do going forward.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Bill Morrison

13. What are the Council's responsibilities for making the City contract bidding process more equitable and transparent?

This council has continually encouraged the administration to be open and transparent with the bidding process for all contracts. Currently the administration posts all contracts on the web and allows for public review of those contracts. The council has a limited role because of the contracting authority the rest with the Mayor but we have continually requested to see the bids and have also received information from the administration if we had concerns about any contract bidding issue.