

# Coalition for a Better Memphis Candidate Questionnaire Memphis City Council

## Erskine Gillespie – District 7

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 more than 20yrs of community service experience. In 1989 began my formal service to the community, when my volunteer work resulted in my becoming the Director of Volunteer Services for the Free the Children (FTC). Following my tenure with FTC, I founded Youth Growing Up Experiencing Spiritual Success (Y. G.U.E.S.S) program. After a near fatal illness, which resulted in my having to have a lifesaving organ transplant, I became a volunteer with Mid-South Transplant Foundation (MSTF). My volunteer efforts with this organization resulted in my being offered the position of Community Outreach Coordinator in 2001. In 2010 MSTF promoted to the organization's Development Coordinator, which is the position I currently hold.

I have a more than 20yr customer oriented history with FedEx Express, where I held various positions ranging from Flight Operations, Sales, Customer Service and Account Services.

I attended Howard University where my concentration was on Public Administration and Chemistry. I also attended St. Louis College of Pharmacy. I was most recently enrolled in University of Phoenix seeking a degree in Marketing.

I am a lifelong resident of Memphis, who has resided within the boundaries of District 7 for nearly 40yrs. I have mastered the spirit of collaboration, and unification. I also have a proven track record of being a motivator and a visionary, which is supported by the successes of Y.G.U.E.S.S, and my many successes with MSTF, where I have been able to transform the community image of this organization that has resulted in it now being one of the top Organ Procurement Organizations in the country. My ability to build unique collaborations, in a very creative fashion, has resulted in my securing multiple local and Federal grants. In essence, I bring vision, inspiration hope, community connectivity, professionalism, and a known and trusted personality to the council.

2. What is your vision for the City? How would you use this office to achieve the vision? 1) My immediate vision is that we most invest in our next generations, by having a vibrant family oriented city – one that continuously engages our

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youth while promoting a family atmosphere. This we can accomplish by getting our corporations to support youth development through the Arts, Sciences and Technologies. We can build a collaborative spirit amongst the many churches we have in all our communities, and get them trained and educated about grant writing and funding; therefore, affording them the opportunity to develop community specific youth based programing that will nurture, captivate, educate and entertain our youth. These are just a couple of my ideas. 2) I know that if our city is to grow and compete with other major cities we must invest now in our transit system. Our economy is showing us that mass transit is going to be the wave of the future, and if we don't look into the future now we are only going to be left that much further behind. We are considered to be the distribution center of America, because of our strategic location. Let's now capitalize of that, and become the transportation hub of the south – distributing people across the Southern and Mid-West cities and States. There are at least 10 major cities that are an 8 hour or less drive from Memphis – image the reduced travel time by rail. This would increase our workforce pool, and make our city more attractive to major corporations; as well as to tourism. 3) We must bring back major retail to Downtown and to the inner-city (mass transit will lend support to this).

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? At this stage, the only statement I feel I can honestly offer you is thus: I'm a man of Christian Faith, high integrity, and a supporter of equality for all; therefore, I would never support any policy and/or agenda item that did not live up to my standards of fairness for all. I believe that the citizens place council people there to represent them – not dictate to them. Therefore; I will always place matters of public policy before the people for review and comment prior to placing any vote, and these comments will be brought before the full council for consideration as well.
4. What are the three greatest issues facing the City of Memphis today?
  - 1) A divided governmental system (City and County)
  - 2) Overall low performing school system
  - 3) Low wage earning jobs
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? It is imperative that the City's governing body take the lead in promoting economic development, for it is from the governing body that will fuel the corporations, and in turn the corporations can re-invest in the communities on various levels. I am a strong advocate for offering stable corporations incentives including tax credits, as long as they are willing to make a long-term commitment to employing our citizens. I am also an advocate for our small business owners, and I would sponsor programs that would offer incentives to stable small business to relocate into larger abandon buildings that

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sit within the core boundaries of the city; thus, addressing part of our urban blight issue.

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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? The theme of my campaign is "Loving Memphis". I choose that because as a citizen having grown-up in the North Memphis and Frayser communities, I remember when there was love and a sense of pride for your neighborhood. This pride and love is lacking today, but as the District 7 representative, I will rally the communities within my District to again learn to love and respect that which they have – no matter how small or large it may be. They will be motivated and educated to understand that everything that plagues their community is not the responsibility of City Hall – they must take charge of their community first, and show appreciation. When they do this, then others will take notice and be able to lure businesses and the likes back into the core urban areas. The motivation needs to come from City Hall, so that the communities will feel and know that they are not "forgotten soldiers". I ultimately feel that lack of community love, respect and pride is the root cause for the lack redevelopment in some of these blighted communities. As a city we cannot and should not feel that we need to continuously move out a certain group of individuals to redefine the community.
7. What do you regard as the greatest obstacle or barrier to growth in the City today? 1) Our divided governments and school systems. 2) Our outdated transit system.
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. City Council is the Legislative Branch of City Government. Currently the relationships between our governing bodies leave a tremendous amount to be desired. I don't feel that there is any form of collaboration for the common good, and because of the racial tensions that yet has a grasp in this city and county, we are being "strangled" from experiencing economic growth.
9. With regard to the crime rate, what current strategies would you support and what changes would you propose if any?  
Currently I don't feel that I have enough knowledge to truly know what's best for the city. As a lay citizen, I know I would like to see much more police presence in the inner-city. I hear positive things being stated regarding the Blue Crush program. However, I know that I would push to increase the funding for anti-gang programs that is currently connected with our school system. The reduction rest within our school aged students.

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10. Would you be willing to submit to a background check and then allow the results to be published? Sure
11. Do you support the local ethics ordinance? Is the Ordinance sufficient, and if not, what changes would you recommend? In my review of the amended Ordinance #5344, I find it to be sufficient, and see no reason to not be supportive at this present time.
12. What are your ideas with regards to the City's responsibility for funding Memphis City Schools? Due to what is the current situation with an impending merger of the school systems, I don't see how I could really answer this question. Once things are finished in the courts, single source funding could be at hand.
13. What are the Council's responsibilities for making the City contract bidding process more equitable and transparent? I would like to postpone my response to this question, due to the fact that I need to do more research into the current policies and procedures regarding the City contract bidding process. My knowledge base regarding this is too limited at this time.