

Coalition for a Better Memphis Candidate Questionnaire Memphis City Council

Isaac Wright – District 8 Pos. 2

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 am seeking to become one of your next city council members because I care about our city, our way of life now and the future that we will leave to our children. I believe I bring experience, values, character, and the dedication required to lead our city forward during this period of opportunity, change, and challenge.

I bring over 14 years of proven real world leadership experience with the federal government, including in-depth experience in personnel management, program and operations management, fiscal management and budgeting, business development, strategic planning, professional development and team building. Additionally, I bring experience as an entrepreneur and over 10 years as an instructor and trainer in leadership and management. I am an effective communicator with excellent interpersonal, verbal and written communication and presentation skills and I am patient and highly effective when working with diverse groups and personalities. I have the ability to work independently or as a member of a team.

I have a core set of principals and values that I believe to be of the utmost importance and I believe that elected officials have an obligation to listen to the viewpoints of others. I also believe that working with the other elected officials to do what is in the best interest of our city should be the highest priority of those elected to serve. It is imperative that leaders engage in productive dialogue without compromising their integrity or core values. Elected leaders must lead by example, modeling good character and upholding high moral standards.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Isaac Wright – The Wright Choice – Memphis City Council District 8 – Position 2

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

I want Memphis to be the best place to live, work, shop, visit, worship, play, grow a business and raise a family in the country.

Memphis can live up to it's identity as a "city of good abode." Our city should be a city of choice.

My highest priorities would be to lead by example and work with the other elected officials to do what is in the best interest of our city and serve without compromising my integrity or core values. I will also work with business and education leaders to ensure that Memphis is a thriving and growing community.

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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?

To ensure that there is accurate representation in the development of public policy and government, I would utilize Leadership Teams and Advisory Committees comprised of a broad cross section of Memphians. The city has a number of programs and policies in place that support inclusion, I would ensure that those policies are followed.

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

The greatest issues facing our city today are:

- Safety and Security of our Citizens. Safety and security are fundamental to our quality of life and are a major factor influencing whether businesses and residents stay in our community.
- Economic Growth (Businesses and Jobs). Business development and job creation play an essential role in the overall economic health and quality of life in Memphis. The vitality and growth of the business base and job market are fundamental components to sustaining and growing our community.
- Education of our Children and Adults. As we create an environment conducive to supporting new businesses, commit resources to capital improvement projects and also work with the businesses currently operating in Memphis to create jobs in our community, we must ensure that our schools, colleges, and universities are producing well-rounded, high-achieving individuals prepared to enter the workforce.

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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?

Economic development plays an essential role in the overall economic health and quality of life in our city. The vitality and growth of the business and economic base and job market are fundamental components to sustaining and growing our community. The challenge for our city government is to create capital investments in new businesses but we need to also work with the businesses currently operating in Memphis to create additional jobs in our community. We have to simultaneously work on attracting new businesses while expanding our existing businesses.

The initiatives that I would promote and support are

- Establish policies and protocols that make our City government more transparent, more efficient, and more responsive to the citizens it serve.
- Support solid plans to guide the city forward in a fiscally responsible and sustainable way.
- Make significant upgrades and modernizations to our aging infrastructure.
- Continue to support programs that provide economic growth by creating jobs and expanding support for all businesses.
- Find ways to continue to provide access to affordable housing.
- Invest in youth programs and support our schools in their efforts to boost academic achievement for our children.

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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?

Community development of our city is just as important as business development. There is something special about buying and living in your own home. It gives you a feeling of accomplishment, you have the pride of ownership and nothing compares to being a permanent part of your neighborhood. The Housing and Community Development Division has done a tremendous job in revitalizing public housing and communities. The city should continue to support and expand the revitalization projects in blighted areas. Working with local non-profit organizations to encourage responsible homeownership and supporting landlords, while encouraging landlords to maintain their properties will aid in community redevelopment. The use of the Environmental Court approach is working and should be supported and expanded.

Another way to strengthen and support existing neighborhoods that are within the urban core would be to start Neighborhood Stabilization Programs. These programs for housing would be a great way to revitalize our neighborhoods and make it easy and possible for qualified buyers to own a home. At a minimum, I think we need to at least look at creating a program that mirrors Habitat for Humanity.

We need to also find funds for updating and fixing properties classified as blight and put programs in place that create high-quality, energy efficient housing and arranging for tiered subsidies based on income levels and neighborhoods, in an effort to jump start the local market, create affordability for buyers and renters and support local economic development and job growth. The hope is to restore local confidence, protect recent and planned investments and ultimately turn around our housing market.

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

One of the greatest obstacles to growth in our city is funding. It's no secret that we, as a city and county, are overly dependent on property taxes, transfer taxes, facilities taxes, and impact fees. We have to find alternatives or better ways of funding the needs of our local government.

Encouraging the citizens and leaders of Memphis to embrace a growth mindset is also a barrier to growing Memphis. Encouraging creative and entrepreneurial ideas will help to build the city and fuel growth and development.

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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.

The city council is the legislative body that governs Memphis. The relationship between the mayor and the council is very similar to the relationship between the legislative and executive branches of our country. The City Council consists of elected part-time nonpartisan members. The primary responsibility of the City Council is to establish the policies and guidance necessary to carry out these policies and to approve the local budget. The other elected and appointed bodies serve and provide the local government with recommendations and advice.

The mayor has administrative authority and represents the City at various ceremonial functions and at other community and intergovernmental meetings. He has political independence and the power to appoint and dismiss department heads. The mayor also prepares and administers the city budget but the council must approve most of his actions.

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

To effectively contribute to the reduction of the crime rate in Memphis, I would support the Memphis Police Department and the Shelby County Sheriff department in their efforts to fight crime. One step in that direction is to continue to support the Blue Crush initiative, but also to expand the community policing program. Increased visibility of officers will have an impact on crime rates. Ensuring that police are properly equipped and trained will also lead to a reduction in crime. Other strategies include expanding employment and education opportunities for citizens.

I honestly could not make recommendations for changes in police practices without looking at the crime data and research facts from Memphis and similar cities. The police and sheriff departments are the subject matter experts and I would support all best practices and strategies utilized by our crime fighters to keep our residents safe. I would hold them accountable for their actions but also commend them for their successes because the safety and security our city is fundamental to our quality of life and is a major factor influencing whether businesses come and residents stay in our great city.

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10. Would you be willing to submit to a background check and then allow the results to be published?

Yes, I would be willing to submit to a background check and then allow the results to be published. As a military officer, I currently hold a Top Secret (SCI) Clearance for the federal government.

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

Yes, I support the local ethics ordinance. The only recommendation that I have is to create tougher punishment and disciplinary penalties for those who violate the ordinance. Our elected officials have to lead by example and must be held to a higher standard. We have to restore confidence and make city government more transparent and more responsive to the citizens we were elected to represent and serve.

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

We must invest in our youth and support our schools in their efforts to boost academic achievement for our children.

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

The council must be dedicated to creating a city contract bidding process that is open, fair, transparent, and timely for procuring good and services. To support this effort, bid opportunities, current and past City contracts, and other financial and procurement information must be made available to the public through various mediums. But the success of the process depends on informed public participation. For true transparency, we need more people involved in the processes that affect their lives.