

Coalition for a Better Memphis Candidate Questionnaire Memphis City Council

Kemba Ford – 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 was born January 1974 in Memphis, TN; I am a registered voter in the city, and I love Memphis and the state of Tennessee – that’s why I am qualified to be a public servant. I care!
I attended private and public schools, and I believe this gave me an opportunity to meet and know young people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. After graduating from White Station High, I moved to Boston to attend college and was exposed to so many different cultures, languages and people and these life experiences caused me to challenge my limited belief system. For instance, I had never met a black person whose first language was Spanish or French until I went away to school. This was 20 yrs ago, and the internet was not available yet, so today’s youth have so many informational tools – I had encyclopedias. I have spent most of my adult life working as an actor, both Equity and SAG. I remember well the day I learned my life purpose in this work; my mentor and Director, Stella Reed said: “ Art has the power to change people’s lives”. I felt those words resonate deep within, and correlated the civil rights work and public service of my family into a new expression – Performing Art. I believe that my work as a stage actor has given me an ability to work with group of people towards a common goal and to overcome differences for the good of ALL. As far as the other candidates in this race, I would prefer to learn what we have in common and how we can all work together no matter the outcome of this race to share ideas and energy toward a greater Memphis – not focusing on differences.
Thank you.

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2. What is your vision for the City? How would you use this office to achieve the vision? My vision of Memphis is "A New Beginning". We have so many great things going for us, if we only took the time to see them as good and positive. I have often said there are lots of people from Memphis who have done, and are doing great things all over the world. We are special and unique, just like our water supply. I see Memphians building the future of our city from this paradigm. A city is nothing without the people who reside in it, and give it life from a myriad of different perspectives. If we can challenge ourselves, our community to be open to new ideas, new ways of doing business and a new way of seeing our city then we can experience the exponential changes necessary for a progressive city of growth and wealth. This office is a symbol of leadership; leading by example – allowing changes in leadership with new ideas and life experiences to share can be a powerful catalyst – not just lip service.

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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? Well, I alone cannot insure anything that requires a collective to decide. I can say that I will work fairly and diligently with all branches of government for the collective good of every Memphian, no matter race/age/gender/what neighborhood they live in. We have got to put down the politics of race, and using wedge issues (religion, sexual orientation) to separate and divide us. It's detrimental and useless in a progressive, creative society. There are some tough issues we are facing in our city and nation; how can we come to the table to resolve anything if we are constantly denigrating/"hating on" each other. We need to move forward, create "A New Beginning" for Memphis and it has to be exemplified in our leadership. If you would take a moment and look at your hand; let's say the council is like a hand. You have five fingers – each one is a different size/shape, each has a different function and name – but they all work together so the hand functions the way its supposed to. You can do great things with your hands! We need real people with different life and educational experiences in leadership, so our gov't will be a true representation of the life of the people, for the people.

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

Education – Jobs; Economic Development – Jobs; Crime – education Economic Development – Jobs! The biggest issue for our country is JOBS, so of course it's extremely relevant to our city and its residents.

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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? We should be as instrumental as possible in promoting econ dev. Leadership in any city has the possibility of being a beacon of light for our community to businesses from all over the world. Like the “bat signal” in the night sky that says we are calling for progress, growth and willing to make Memphis a great environment to do business. It starts with us, we have to be ready/willing for the industry of today and especially the future to develop right here in Memphis. Technology, performing arts (music, dance, visual art), sports and entertainment are the predominant interests of today’s youth – let’s create and support the efforts of these business interests in Memphis. I believe it will give the next generation a reason to see our city as a major player on the national stage. Creating better tax incentives for tv and movie productions may keep some of them from going to Atlanta or Louisiana. We can also use the “tax freeze” that downtown developers enjoy to motivate development in blighted areas of our community.

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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? Blighted areas and their residents need to know they are a part of Memphis too. I have answered this I believe in question 5 regarding tax freeze incentives for developing unused land or dilapidated areas. Blight is also a state of mind influenced by environment, so people how they see themselves as a part of our city as a whole must be addressed when we work to make our city a better place to live.

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7. What do you regard as the greatest obstacle or barrier to growth in the City today? Being willing to change, and usher in new ideas, take on a global view of our city and the way we participate in gov't. Memphis is not an island, separated from everyone else. We have to embrace influences from other cities, cultures to bring our community up to speed with the rest of the nation, and the world – in business and socially. We also have to start loving Memphis. It starts with us. If we do not love and support each other's successes, ideas, and backgrounds – how in the world can anyone else see our community as a great place to live, work and raise a family.

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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 congress of a city, and should be representative of the diversity of its people – in regards to ideas, background, experience and hope. Again, I would compare the relationship of all branches of leadership to a hand. They all have a different function, but work together to make the hand capable of great things.

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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? Well let's stop making police/fire/sanitation the first places to go to make budget cuts. Maybe we should look at crime a different way: maybe if we, as a community created better options for our youth to express themselves and their talents then crime would not seem the only way they can live...and die. It's like wishing children would not watch so much tv, so you punish the child and take away tv privileges – thus making it even more important to do it. Why not take the child away from the tv, not the tv away from the child. Drugs/crime rate will change when we give our young and poor another way to live, another set of options.

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10. Would you be willing to submit to a background check and then allow the results to be published? *Would be willing to do so, as long as it the info published is pertinent to the job criteria.*

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11. Do you support the local ethics ordinance? Is the Ordinance sufficient, and if not, what changes would you recommend? I support ethics ordinances that are fair and a standard for all – white and black. We have a history of treating the ethics of blacks and whites with a different set of rules and penalties. Let's be honest, Memphis and its history has been written in black and white.

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12. What are your ideas with regards to the City's responsibility for funding Memphis City Schools? Common sense! We must have a fully functioning public school system. Period.

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13. What are the Council's responsibilities for making the City contract bidding process more equitable and transparent? Not sure, but I am willing to learn and do what is right for the citizens of Dist 7 and Memphis as a whole. Being honest.