

Coalition for a Better Memphis Candidate Questionnaire Memphis City Council

The Coalition for a Better Memphis is an independent non-profit organization, made up of Shelby County individuals, businesses and organizations. Its mission is to assist area voters in identifying qualified candidates for public office.

For the October 6, 2011 election, CBM's Candidate Assessment Committee is interviewing candidates for the Memphis City Council with the intention of publishing a "voter guide" of candidate evaluations.

We hope that you might be able to use an electronic version of this questionnaire. If you would like an electronic version please immediately contact Peggy Callahan at peggy@bettermemphis.org or visit our website www.bettermemphis.org under the "Candidate Ratings Guide" tab you will find the files to download.

Completed questionnaires may be mailed to:

Coalition for a Better Memphis
7730 Goshawk Cove
Cordova, TN 38016

Electronic versions can be emailed to:

Peggy Callahan
peggy@bettermemphis.org

Direct any questions to:
Peggy Callahan
peggy@bettermemphis.org

Please complete this questionnaire and return it to
The Coalition for a Better Memphis
No later than 5 p.m.,
August 8, 2011

Please answer all questions carefully – your responses will be printed on the CBM website EXACTLY as they are provided to us.

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Name: City Councilman Kemp Conrad

- 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?**

First, I believe I have been an ethical and effective Councilman over the last three years. I have a proven track record of getting things done on the Council and have cultivated positive relationships with all of my colleagues and the Mayor and his team.

For the past fifteen years I have been building a successful business and career and building diverse and bipartisan relationships in Memphis through my behind the scenes work in the community. In these endeavors I have worked extremely hard and have had the good fortune to find success that has affected positive outcomes in my business and community endeavors.

My background includes a strong educational foundation. I earned my BA from Rhodes College and earned an MBA from the Owen Graduate School of Management at Vanderbilt University. As an employee and principal in one of the most successful commercial real estate firms in Memphis, my practice focuses on advising corporations and users of real estate that are making large capital decisions as it relates to their real estate assets. I know first-hand what these companies are looking for in terms of workforce and how our city needs to better position itself to compete.

During the last ten years in my business career I have been in one of the most dynamic and important sectors of our economy – the commercial real estate business. I have been fortunate to have reached the top of my profession in a relatively short amount of time.

Second, as a past Chairman of the Shelby County Republican Party, I understand the political process and have forged deep relationships with both Republicans and Democrats, both in Memphis and across the state and country. I have been able to leverage this political experience and relationships on the Council to drive positive change for Memphis.

Third, and most important, I have been involved at the non-profit board and community level for the past fifteen years, working hard to create positive change in Memphis. I believe that the issues that I am most passionate about are the issues that Memphis needs to solve now. Once re-elected I will continue to advocate for these policy issues and leverage these relationships and experience to coalesce our community to solve big challenges.

My focus has been on:

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Education – Especially Early Childhood Education: I am a past director of Partners in Public Education and a former Board Member of Hope House, a day care and early childhood education center for children infected or affected by HIV-AIDS. In an attempt to educate and promote dialogue, I have researched this issue extensively and have written several editorials for the Commercial Appeal – going back to 2001. This is an issue I care about and have worked on for a long time and believe to be extremely important.

Racial Divide: I was the youngest member of the National Civil Rights Museum Board of Directors and have studied and penned several editorials for the Commercial Appeal about the income and education disparities that divide us – and ways to begin to address this challenge. In addition, I was a founding member of Mpace Memphis, a group that has affected positive change by bringing young people in our city to forge relationships across racial lines, promote civic and political engagement, and drive positive change. I also led an effort on the Council where Council members worshipped together at each others' places of worship.

Economic Development: As the current Chairman of the Economic Development Committee as well as the Council representative on the new EDGE Board, I have been on the front lines of our economic development efforts. I have worked side by side with Mayors Wharton and Luttrell as well as the Chamber of Commerce to create thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars of capital investment.

My decision to run for reelection is the culmination of years of behind the scenes service and the desire to continue to affect positive change at this critical juncture in our city's future. Finally, we are on an upward trajectory and beginning to achieve our potential as a city.

The main differentiator between me and the other candidate in my race is that I am an entrepreneurial business person and my opponent is a Union leader. One of the main challenges we face in city government is budgetary issues. Bloated union demands have further strained our budgets. It is unrealistic and irresponsible for today's leaders to allow these to continue unchecked. The Council already has several members that have the best interests of the Union leadership at heart. I believe I am a voice for the common tax payer. I run a small business and know what it is like to scrutinize every line item of the budget, how to take care of customers, and how to compete in a competitive world. I believe we need this kind of experience on the city council so that we can ensure that government is delivering the highest caliber of service at the lowest possible cost.

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My biggest asset is that I know this community and how to build coalitions and how to bring people together to get things done. City government will not solve our challenges – however I will continue to use my position on the Council to coalesce support in the community to work with people of goodwill to solve our most pressing challenges.

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

I have a vision for the City of Memphis to be one of the safest and most united communities in the country. I want us to come together across socioeconomic, racial, and political divides so that every child has an equal chance at a prosperous future.

My vision of Memphis has a lower tax rate – which is sustainable because of our efficient and corruption-free government, coupled with a vibrant and growing population and a bustling and growing business base. We would thrive with our diverse population and educated workforce, a dynamic urban core with stellar amenities, and a City and Chamber of Commerce that have smartly decided to focus on growing industries where we have a distinct competitive advantage – logistics, the biosciences and bio-device sector, and our music heritage. Finally, my Memphis is a community of true equality of opportunity and our child mortality rate is one of the lowest in the country and our educational system has been totally reformed to compete with the best the world has to offer. It is a community that is creating more wealth and more jobs. We are known for how we wrap our arms around children at the earliest age to begin educating and loving them. We are a leader in strengthening families and lowering teenage out of wedlock births. And we are a city where love and peace flourish, a city we are proud to tell others about, and a city with a bright future with a place for our children to prosper.

My vision is a city that has come together to weave the beautiful mosaic of our community together with a tighter and denser knot. That is the Memphis I dream about and I want to serve and help create that reality.

Fortuitously, my passions are aligned with some of the most critical issues that we must overcome so that Memphis reaches its potential.

First, as the crime commission website states, “If we can’t be safe, we can’t be anything.” As the Vice Chairman of the Public Safety Committee my number one focus will continue to be applying myself to support what is working – such as Operation Safe Community and Blue Crush. However, to drive crime lower now we need to build community capacity.

Second, while we must apply the tourniquet to the immediate crime crisis facing our community, I will continue to use the office to bring people together to solve the underlying and systemic issues that give crime life – poverty, lack of educational attainment, lack of a citywide early childhood strategy, especially for “at risk” children, and the high percentage of kids born to single mothers. According to the Urban Childhood Institute, 65% of children born were born to

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single mothers in 2002. Also according to UCI a child in a single parent home is seven times more likely to live in poverty than their two parent counterparts.

Government alone cannot rectify this – but leaders in government can be catalysts to bring the business, faith, and non-profit communities together to solve these challenges. The communities that prosper are the ones where government, the faith community, and the business community have shared values and goals, and are working together to create a new and better tomorrow.

Third, and while it should go without saying, I will be accountable to the people and make sure that city government is accountable to the people – not the other way around.

In Memphis, the initiatives that are really working, Shelby Farms Conservancy, Mpace Memphis, Biotech Foundation, Nexus, Leadership Academy, etc., are all a function of diverse people bringing all of their varied backgrounds and experiences to the table to affect positive change. I will continue to partner, and continue to make city government a partner, in these important initiatives and those of the future, that will have a profound impact on our city.

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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?

I believe the best way to insure there is diversity represented in the development of public policy and government is to support those with a solid and verifiable track record of commitment to diversity.

When we get these types of people in office, who are articulate on these issues, and who can help knock down the artificial walls that divide us, more people will see that diversity is truly a community asset that will make us stronger. In addition, Memphis is grappling with, and has the opportunity to be a leader in how to leverage diversity. As America grows more diverse, we are one of the first MSA's with a minority majority population – and most other major urban areas will also experience this dynamic. Thus, Memphis has an opportunity to lead in the regard and when we figure out how to make it work, it gives us a competitive advantage in the future.

In addition, I believe that it is appropriate to insure that all of the boards and commissions of city government reflect our community. As the first Leadership Chairman of MPACT Memphis, I was charged with getting our members on numerous boards and committees and was very successful in doing so. As a City Councilman, I have continued this advocacy.

Finally, I will support leadership development programs such as Nexus, a faith based mentoring program, and groups such as The Leadership Academy and Leadership Memphis. I have participated in both the Nexus and Leadership Academy ELDI programs and I believe that these are great ways to develop leaders so that there is diversity in public policy and government.

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

The greatest issues facing Memphis today and in the future are inextricably linked and intertwined. While I believe Memphis has turned the corner and is on an upward trajectory, our prior path was unequal, unstable, and unsustainable. We must continue the fight or we will slip backwards.

The immediate issue is crime and I am proud that this council, working with Operation Safe Community and the men and women in blue, have driven crime down almost 30% over the last four years! But, we are not resting on our laurels and we will continue to support and implement new strategies to keep improving.

Second, our property taxes are far too high which is driving people out of the city and stealing money from other priorities. This is due to an inefficient government and benefit structure that is outdated and unaffordable. I have been a leading advocate of comprehensive budgetary reform.

As an example, since 2000, Memphis has lost 19,000 residents despite big annexations – the only comparable city in the south to do so (other than New Orleans, which was hit by a hurricane), yet from 2006-2008 (when I got on the council, 2008) the city has added hundreds of employees and increased the operating budget by \$48 million!

In addition, from 1998-2007, the population has only increased by 8% (largely due to annexations), inflation has been 23% during this time, yet the budget has grown by 51%. Finally, the cost of city government grew from \$400MM in 1990 to over \$600MM today – and our population is basically flat.

In addition, our unfunded OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefits) liability is approximately \$1.5BB. These are liabilities that we owe but don't have the funds to pay.

Fortunately, due largely to my advocacy, we are currently debating pension reform and had the biggest rightsizing in recent history during the last budget cycle.

The third greatest issue is the need to increase prosperity in our community. This educational process should start with our youngest kids.

In a nutshell, we know that 80% of brain development occurs before the age of 5 but we spend 80% of our public education dollars from age 5 on. In addition, numerous studies have validated that the return on every dollar invested in early childhood education is \$3 to \$17. This is especially important for our at

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risk kids and right now in Memphis our kids are scoring in the 20th percentile on national tests of kindergarten readiness.

I believe our next community wide initiative that binds the faith, government, non-profit, and corporate community together – is that of saving THIS generation of children. It is deplorable, embarrassing, and morally wrong that we lead the nation in infant mortality and our rate is double the national average. Unfortunately, and according to the Urban Childhood Institute, much of this is due to births to single, and often times, teenage mothers. While we need to support and develop initiatives to support these single parent families, we must also work to educate and do more to reduce teen pregnancies.

Also, in order to become a united community, we must begin progress on reducing the education and income disparities that exist between white and black Memphians. There are no easy answers or quick fix solutions here, but we can start with not losing another generation of children and focusing on economic development and wealth creation in the black community and support initiatives that are building minority owned businesses.

I will continue to wake up every day and focus on these three issues, public and personal safety, property tax reductions, and increasing prosperity.

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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?

I am proud to have worked hand in hand to accelerate our economic development initiatives over the last three years.

The City of Memphis has invested in the Memphis Regional Chamber of Commerce and the experts have done a great job. The Memphis Chamber and the Memphis Fast Forward plan should propel Memphis to the top of its peer group.

I was a leading advocate of PILOT reform program and this reform has directly resulted in some of the major projects that have recently been announced. This was one of major goals when I ran and one of the many targets I achieved.

When I completed this survey in 2008, economic development was virtually dead. Look how far we have come!

Our region had the reputation among the nation's foremost site selection consultants as one that is not business friendly. Once this train leaves the station it is hard to stop – but we turned it around!

We eliminated the 75% Shelby County residency requirement. Companies cannot force their employees to live in a particular area. If we do the hard work of making the community better, people will WANT to live here. It's a sad state of affairs if you have to legislate where folks live. We also reduced the reporting and bureaucracy, and reduced the political involvement and meddling.

I believe that the Memphis Fast Forward Plan is right on target. Many of the issues I am advocating in this questionnaire will help drive economic development: educating our workforce, making our streets safe, and ensuring that we have an efficient and corruption-free government.

These are not my ideas alone. They come directly from the Fast Forward plan, but I do not believe in recreating the wheel when many of the best and brightest in our community have devised a great strategy.

My favorites are:

- Make technology transfer out of our Universities best in class so that we can commercialize this intellectual property (IP) that lies dormant in the labs. gTX is a great examples of what kind of homegrown industries can be grown. The possibilities are endless. The State of California receives billions upon billions

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of dollars every year from companies that have commercialized IP from its universities.

- Growing market share of minority owned firms as only eighth-tenths of 1% of total revenue goes to minority owned businesses in a city where the population is 60% minority.
- Revise and ensure that our tax and incentive structure is aligned with our economic development priorities.
- Develop and execute a strategic plan in logistics, film and television production, and revive our once proud music industry.
- Aggressively recruit and retain young mobile knowledge workers
- Create a linked park system and greenbelt (we have made great progress here and the best is yet to come!)

Of course, we also need to focus on key quality of life issues and improve our educational system to develop our future workforce.

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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?

A great example of a community based initiative that is strengthening neighborhoods is the Orange Mound CDC. They send out representatives whenever a new family/person moves into the neighborhood. They share the history of the neighborhoods with these new residents and encourage them to keep up their property.

I believe we should also explore and expand incentives for developers to redevelop in these neighborhoods. We also need to make it easier for people to access the current incentives that are available – not just those with connections in high places.

Thus, I would support the creation of a one stop shop for people who want to develop in Memphis. It would be a customer focused and user friendly place to learn about permitting, rezoning, incentives that are available, etc. Chattanooga implemented this and since they have, redevelopment of many blighted areas has been unbelievable.

In a nutshell, we need to make it easy and empower our citizens so that entrepreneurial spirit that runs in this community can rise up and harness the opportunities to reduce blight and transform the community.

Finally, like in crime, we need to adopt a “no tolerance” approach to blight and I believe that we should more strictly enforce the codes that are already on the books. One of the things that former Mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani is famous for popularizing is the “broken window” theory – that criminal activity thrives when parts of town get run down, have graffiti, broken windows, abandoned houses, etc. When these areas are cleaned up, crime is reduced dramatically.

Thus, I believe if we really focused on this, reducing blight would also help to reduce crime.

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

I believe that the greatest obstacles and barriers to growth in our city today are three intertwined issues, the three (3) P's that I wrote about in Question 4:

- Crime (Public and personal safety)
- While improving, a government that is not efficient and misallocates resources (leading to high Property Taxes)
- Lack of effective early childhood strategies/Need for education reform and reducing the education and income disparities that exist between white and black Memphians (Prosperity)

People, mostly the affluent and middle class, have been voting with their feet and leaving the city. Thus we are left with a higher tax burden that is being carried by fewer people.

Memphis has lost 19,000 people since 2000, yet in 2008 the city budget increased by \$40,000,000. Thanks in large part to my advocacy; we cut that much in the 2011 budget. .

Memphis and our region are in ferocious competition with regions and cities not only in the South and in the United States in general, but from all over the world.

We are not just competing with Southaven Mississippi, but Shanghai and Singapore.

Several cities have taken aim at our global supremacy in air cargo transport. Make no mistake, the stakes are high. We need leaders who can unite Memphians to come together so that we are not forever relegated to third tier status.

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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 role of the City Council is to review and approve zoning issues, to serve as the legislative body in City Government and to approve policies that the Mayor and administration are to enforce.

In effect, the Council is the Board of Directors for the City, the Mayor is the CEO, and his Directors are the management team.

In addition, I believe that City Councilman can use their seats to advocate for important policy issues, and be a catalyst for change in the city – and I see government as a partner in this.

I have worked very well with Mayor Wharton and his team and we have partnered on numerous initiatives. These include the Employee Suggestion Program, traffic signals on the Greenline, pension reform, and economic development to name a few.

I would like to see more communication and collaboration between all the governing bodies and key community assets such as MLGW and MCS, and groups like the Downtown Memphis Commission (DMC). It seems to me that many of the members of the various bodies are too focused on their immediate issues causing them to lose sight of the big picture.

I am proud to have the support of MLGW Chairman Darrell Cobbins and DMC President Paul Morris as well as DMC Chairman Bobbi Gillis. I believe this shows how I have worked with these organizations. I was honored to also work with Paul, Mayor Wharton, and MPD to get bike patrols downtown which has dramatically decreased crime.

In addition to these roles, we should have one or two members from each body, and the Mayors of Shelby County and the seven municipalities, and school boards, serve on a regional task force that helps to guide regional strategy. I would like to be a catalyst for this and I will work for it in my second term.

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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?

First, I am very proud to have supported strategies that over the last few years have driven crime to its lowest levels since 1985! Helping to get tougher statewide truth in sentencing legislation, and being a key broker of the deal to eliminate the residency requirement and accelerate police hiring are two issues I am proud of.

We can't give enough credit to the men and women in blue who are making it happen day after day. They have a tough job and I am so thankful for the work they do.

I am also very proud to have achieved one of my top goals when I ran for council in 2008 not long after I got elected.

As background, according to the FBI's 2006 unified crime report Tennessee is the second most violent state in the nation. In cities with greater than 500,000 people, Memphis is the second most violent city and has the highest murder rate per capita (Nashville is in the top five in violent crimes per capita).

This is not just an issue in Memphis but for the state and Nashville.

The single most important action that will lead to an immediate and drastic reduction in crime is to pass tougher state crime laws for violent offenders.

Interestingly enough, the first sentence in the first paragraph of the Tennessee state constitution calls on the state to provide for the peace and safety of the people. The state is falling short of this principle. In Tennessee for many violent offenses, criminals are eligible for parole after 30% of time served – and criminals get credit for time served awaiting trial.

As an example, the state of New York has cut their crime rate IN HALF since the sentencing reform act of 1995 was passed. That Act eliminated parole for all second time offenders. The economic development effect was that New York's population has increased tremendously (in a time when out-migration is occurring from the northeast). New York City, in a span of ten years, has gone from one of the most dangerous cities in America to one of the safest. We can do the same in Memphis! In fact, the crime rate in NYC today is what it was in the late 1950's and early 1960's.

The states of Virginia and Florida have had similar results through tougher state enforcement.

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Last year, Tennessee passed tougher truth in sentencing laws to hold violent offenders and criminals accountable. I was able to play a small role by having the Council, County Commission, Nashville Council, Jackson Council, and Knoxville Council pass a resolution urging the Legislature to pass the tougher crime laws. All of the large cities banding together sent a message.

In addition to the above, as a member of the City Council I have focused on the following ideas to reduce crime. Again, many of these are not my original ideas, but strategies that are data driven, research based, and developed by the best and brightest in our community:

- Aggressively support Operation Safe Community – which includes Blue Crush and the Real Time Crime Center and video surveillance. In addition, Operation Safe Community details Fifteen Strategies in three sections: Smart Policing, Aggressive Prosecution, and Law Enforcement-Community Partnerships.

Interestingly enough, 11 of the 15 recommendations are in the community partnership section of the plan. I believe that the thread weaving itself through my vision, what has defined my track record in Memphis, and what differentiates me from others in my race, is using my Council seat to affect change through community based partnerships.

Examples from Operation Safe Community that I would support include:

- Implement efficiency study recommendations so we can hire more police officers
- Reactivate neighborhood watch programs so that the citizens can assist in the fight against crime. Harold Collins and I are working on a coordinated Neighborhood watch program with a dedicated resource to oversee it.
- For the long term, reallocate the current funds used to prop up the bloated and inefficient city government to invest in community and faith based organizations that are proving out measurable results for at risk children, such as the Boys & Girls Clubs, Memphis Athletic Ministries, Youth Villages, Neighborhood Christian Center, etc.

Finally, I believe that the community should aggressively support financially the police foundation which I believe would improve morale among the force and also allow the force to invest in cutting edge technology and programs to combat crime. We also need to hire more prosecutors in the DA's office.

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

I am proud of my hard earned reputation in the community and would happily submit to a background check as well as a drug test, and allow those results to be published.

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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 have always seen public office as a high calling and as pure public service. It is unfortunate that so many people have destroyed the public's trust of government.

Really, the heart of this issue is "conflicts of interest" and we need smart strategies where elected officials must disclose and not vote when conflicts exist. We must also increase transparency so that we give the citizens and the voters to monitor this and take action at the polls if elected officials are serving themselves and not the public.

I do support the ethics ordinance as well as the ethics office, officer, and board that is being established in the City.

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

We are at a historic crossroads as it relates to education in our community. Most believe that with the consolidation of schools, the city's mandatory funding requirement will be eliminated. I support this as currently city residents are effectively double taxed for education as they pay once through the tax rate, and then again to the tune of \$80MM through the city.

That being said, I am for funding, with an annual review based on measurable results, reform based programs that are proven to work – and there should be a focus on low income, at risk, children. This is why I supported investing \$2.5MM in the summer reading program last summer for MCS.

The state of our educational system not only in Memphis, but in the United States of America, is deplorable. America ranks 21st in the developed countries in science and 24 countries outscore America in math.

70% of U.S. 8th graders can't read at grade level, and there has been a 0% increase in the number of bachelor's and master's degrees awarded in the US – the only developed country with no increase.

Our educational model was conceived during the Cold War while the rest of the developed world is preparing the children for the new century.

We need to move to year round schooling, implement longer school hours, accelerate school choice, introduce merit based pay for teachers so we can recruit the best and brightest, and use technology more effectively.

At the end of the day we need a performance driven system not focused on institutional needs – but one that is designed around individuals and measurable student outcomes.

Also our community needs to make early childhood education for at risk kids a priority. I believe the city government has a role to play here.

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

Our citizens need to know that their tax dollars are being spent wisely and not being used for crony capitalism.

I am in favor of contracts of a certain size coming before the council. While I believe the \$100,000 threshold to be too small, \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 is more in line. I am also in favor of the city developing an objective rating system and if the Administration desires to select a contractor and there is an anomaly in the system, then the contract has to be explained to the council. A review of contracts of too low an amount will result in valuable council time being engaged in debate about which janitorial company to use on a city building – when the time should be spent on major strategic issues that affect the city.

What I am not in favor of is creating an entire new Bureaucracy as exists in county government to oversee bids. In fact, I would suggest an audit of the city procurement system by our most successful private sector companies to ensure best practices are developed and implemented, and the council should enforce.