

Coalition for a Better Memphis Candidate Questionnaire Memphis City Council

Michelle Smith – District 4

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?

Background and Qualifications for City Council:

For the past several years I have built a successful business career and have continued to build community relationships while working within and around the community. I have proven to be a successful leader and have proven results in all of my professional and community endeavors.

I have a strong educational background which includes the following:

- Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science – University of Memphis
- Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance – University of Memphis
- Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting – University of Memphis
- Master of Business Administration in Management- Belhaven College
- Affiliate Broker – Lawrence Johnson Realtors

With this education it has afforded me the opportunity to represent my community on many occasions with the confidence that the job would be done. I have devoted a lot of my time working within the community to make it a better place. I recently wrote the proposal to bring a traveling museum to Memphis, sponsored by the Smithsonian Institute, and this is the first time that it will be presented in an urban environment. I have continued my civic efforts by serving on several community boards such as the Orange Mound Civic Organization, Orange Mound Parade Committee and the Cooper Young Community Farmers Market. I have also found the time to give back to the students within the schools by volunteering my time at Dunbar Elementary. I believe that in order to serve the people you must know the people and I have taken the challenge on and it is very serious to me.

I have worked hard to create a positive change in the community and in Memphis. I believe that the issues that concern my neighbors are the same issues that plague the city and we need to work toward finding a solution as quickly as possible. As a city councilwoman I will be the voice for the people and an advocate for change that will positively affect our communities and the taxpayers of this great city.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

Why Am I running for City Council?

The answer to that is “Why not?” After I have sat through countless hours of municipal meetings, hearing arguments, asking questions and forming opinions, I have garnered a little more than just basic information. What I’ve come to understand is that effective municipal government especially in Memphis can only be achieved if members of Council share themselves as resources. I am willing to do that.

Additionally, I feel that the conversations that take place outside of City Hall and Council Chambers are as important, if not more so, than the ones that take place inside. Being an effective Councilperson, in my opinion, means more than rendering an opinion two times a month. Going out, talking to neighbors, and getting a feel for “the pulse” on the issues ensures exceptional representation. I am willing to do that.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, a person running for council needs to understand their position. After all, private citizens rule society...Elected officials are public servants and stewards of the people. It is imperative that a candidate recognize that upon election they step down as a boss and act instead as an employee. Again, I am willing to even do that.

So, of course, for some people answering a question with another question just won’t do. To those individuals I offer my apologies. My answer is neither out of arrogance nor is it a cheap way to wave off a question. After much thought, it is truly the most honest, impartial, and simple way that I can answer.

What unique qualities would you bring to this position and what differentiates you from other candidates in your race?

The main difference between me and the other candidates in this race is that I am self-motivated and don’t wait for change to happen, I make change happen. I have lived all my life in District 4 and I have heard the cries of the people and I want to make that change. I bring a unique blend of skills and experience to the Memphis City Council, demonstrated business experience and leadership and an ongoing track record of strong community services, coupled with a collaborative approach to problem solving in leadership. The combinations of my degrees foster a sound rational approach to problem solving and a thorough understanding of finance and budgets. As a successful business owner, I bring the knowledge needed to run local government in a businesslike way including delivering a quality product, managing a budget, meeting payroll and making difficult decisions during tough times in a deliberate way. My active involvement in the Orange Mound community provides me with familiarity about a broad range of issues, from the neighborhood level to broader city wide matters.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

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

There comes a time when one's passion grows beyond what a private citizen can affect, and that vision can only be accomplished in a public role. However, I envision a city where neighborhoods work together for the betterment of the community and challenge each other to make their situation better for the future. I envision a city where our schools are performing above board and not just meeting standards.

Some of the ideas for achieving this vision would include:

- Invest in our future, the children. Develop parks to be more family friendly and educate our communities to embrace more greenways within the community
- Proactive policing within the communities. Utilize the COACT units as assistance to the communities in protecting the city.
- Support Neighborhood watch programs.
- Address the blight issue with programs to encourage grassroots neighborhood organizations to acquire, restore and reenter homes into the community for habitation.
- Utilize the eyes and ears of the community to address code enforcement issues. Let the people work with Code enforcement officers and not complain about them.
- Promote economic development through the support of the community. Develop a panel of community leaders and develop a plan of action for the community and assist with implementation.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

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 have lived in Memphis all of my life and I have had the opportunity to explore the diversity that is part of Memphis. Because of this, I have had a rich life full of new ideas, concepts, and an overall appreciation for people's opinions. With that said, I have been very blessed to have been surrounded by various cultures at an early age and to grow and work in an environment that has been culturally diverse. In order to grow as a people and as a city, we must embrace what is different and learn to appreciate what God has placed on this earth.

It is imperative that we work together in order to be role models to our youth of tomorrow. We must show a united front and work together to implement change. I would like to continue the efforts I have started by bringing people together and to ensure all are represented when decisions are made about our communities and the city.

As a councilperson representing District 4, I would seek out input from the diverse citizens who live in the district. I would also encourage the mayor to have diverse recommendations in appointments to boards and commissions that have to be approved by the City Council.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

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

The three greatest issues facing the City of Memphis today are:

Education

1. The education of our youth or should I say the lack thereof. Our children are failing and they need help now. The city council needs to make moves to ensure that our children have all the resources available to them in order to make sure their educational dreams are realized. We understand that all children are not going to four year traditional institutions of higher learning and we also should realize that some of our children will attend a two-year institution, but we must make sure that our children are prepared to face the challenges of this world. As a City Councilperson, it is my endeavor to work with the school system to support education and proper distribution of funding to ensure the future of our children. This must start immediately before our children get further left behind.

In addition, we must look to provide opportunities for adults who are unemployed or underemployed to develop new skills for an evolving work environment. The Workforce Investment Network (WIN) of the city has made strides recently in better management of its resources. Now, we must support and connect their work to the communities in order to develop the human capital of our city at all levels.

Crime

2. Public safety is always an issue. However, it is one that can be addressed by establishing partnerships between the community, law enforcement and crime prevention initiatives. Since I am an active neighborhood watch leader, I am aware that Blue Crush has shown a decrease in crime. But crime still exists, and to identify and address it you must have your ears to the ground and know the part of crime that is not reported. Too many times we rely on numbers to give an idea of the crime in neighborhoods, but the real crime statistics are from the conversations of the residents of the neighborhood. We must encourage the efforts of Neighborhood Watch and encourage the resurgence of Neighborhood Policing.

Economic Development

3. Memphis is a vibrant city. I am most certain that our city has in its arsenal the ability to spur catalytic projects in historically underdeveloped areas. Such investments, when used strategically and deliberately, can revitalize neighborhoods and commercial corridors, stemming blight or decline those areas and creating long-term, sustainable economic growth. Tax abatements could be used effectively to attract businesses to return and invest in areas of town where natural market forces have failed to maintain economic growth. I, as a City Councilwoman, would certainly continue the thoughtful use of such tools to attract investment in areas that would

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

otherwise continue to be ignored by the market. Of course, stringent evaluation criteria and processes must be followed to ensure specific projects warrant investment by the City. In addition, I would also continue utilizing the City's various loan funds to layer additional assistance and incentives for small businesses to participate in the desired redevelopment. Because small businesses have long been recognized as the engine of the economy and source of much needed new jobs, they too must play a role in devising a sustainable revitalization plan.

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?

The City of Memphis is key in promoting economic development within the city. Their role is to entice new businesses to relocate or begin in Memphis. In order to compete on a global scale, we need the amenities in life that will make it attractive for others to want to come here and make their life here. In order to have thriving development economically, we must have a strong educational system and safe environment. We need to focus on the needs of the community first and retain our human assets in the citizens of Memphis. We must focus on building a better educational system, providing a safe, low crime environment and encouraging a healthier way of living by increasing our green space footprint within the communities. We must find ways to retain our graduates in Memphis, and have opportunities available so they will not have to leave the city for job opportunities.

We must also provide a supportive environment for our small business owners in the communities. We must not forget that these small businesses employ a majority of our citizens. We must foster those relationships to help them achieve their potential as big businesses within the city. We need to embrace, encourage and support the minority and women owned business of Memphis. In addition, we must encourage our youth to persevere and encourage them to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities even when the future looks bleak for them. I would support any efforts that would encourage our youth to start their own businesses in Memphis as early as possible.

I would support the PILOT program in the short term as long as the citizens of Memphis benefit by creating new jobs and increasing the quality of life and standard of living. We must always keep our citizens first when developing the economy and make sure their needs are met. We must also hold the beneficiaries of these PILOTs accountable to meeting the requirements of their agreements.

We must develop strong workforce development programs that will create skilled workers to attract and retain businesses. We must work together with our communities and nonprofits to make sure that we utilize the services of the nonprofits to increase the skill levels of our workforce while the city entices new businesses to the city. We must have something to offer to the companies when they arrive and what better offering than an educated, work-ready person.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

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?

In order to strengthen and support neighborhoods within the urban core, we must first develop an effective line of communication. Too many times, our communities are left in the dark as to what is coming to their neighborhood. We need to involve our residents in the decision making process. Living in the Orange Mound community, we have encountered the developers who think they know what is best for the community, instead of asking the residents to identify their needs and how can they help to meet that need. The residents and our elected officials can be a barrier to redevelopment projects because of the lack of communication between them. Communication, communication, communication is the key to strengthening our neighborhoods.

All we ask for as residents of the community is a place to live that is safe, clean, crime-free and has good schools. We owe it to the citizens of Memphis to support them in fulfilling these basic goals. In order to do this, we need to find ways to combat the blight in our neighborhoods. We need programs on all levels to support neighborhoods associations/ civic organizations in taking their communities back.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

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

I believe the greatest obstacle or barrier to growth in the City today is our inability to work together for the common good of the City. Slowly, but surely, we are trying to come together, but we have a long road ahead of us. We bicker over the smallest of issues, to the detriment of making monumental decisions that affect the city in general that will have a profound effect.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

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 of city government. The primary job of the City Council is to be a voice for the citizens of the district for which he or she has been elected. This would also be addressing issues and concerns that would impact the quality of life for our citizens with decisions on the budget presented to the Council by the mayor. The city council should also be an advocate for important public policy issues and be a catalyst for change.

Over the past four years, we have had two mayors. During the tenure of the first mayor, the relationship between the council and the mayor's office was counterproductive. In the more recent years, the current mayor has tried to provide a transparency to government that was lacking from the previous administration. There have been some strides during this administration, but there are many more steps to take forward. We need to work together and Memphis needs representation that has a passion for the city and love for their communities.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

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

I would currently support the community policing proposed by our new director. In addition, I would like to say that public safety is one of; if not the most fundamental service that the public expects its government to provide. Further, simply the perception of an unsafe environment-whether justified or not-would be a major obstacle in the City's plan to continue growing and thriving, as that perception would certainly be a deterrent to residents considering moving to the City, Businesses relocating here, and business and pleasure travelers visiting here.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

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

Yes, most definitely I would be willing. There is nothing to hide.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

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

I do support the local ethics ordinance.

We have lost trust in our elected officials and it is time to hold them accountable for their actions. When elected to a position you are held to a higher standard and you must act accordingly. The current ordinance is a step in the right direction and I believe it is not strong enough. The penalty of \$50 is not high enough to discourage the behavior of elected officers and city employees. The fine should be higher to make you think first before acting. I believe the fine should be higher to discourage unethical behavior.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

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

Parents want a fair share of the funding. My idea in regards to the city's responsibility for funding Memphis City Schools is of course they should be responsible for the funding. The city is responsible for a large part of the blame for the problem that currently exists.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: Michelle E. Smith

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

The City Council should be responsible for making sure that government is transparent and fair in the process of contract bidding. The city council should enforce the processes of contract bidding to make sure that the tax dollars of the citizens are spent wisely.

If there are any discrepancies suspected in the process, I feel that these issues should be brought before the council immediately for review and explanation.