

Coalition for a Better Memphis Candidate Questionnaire Memphis City Council

Rhoda Stigall – District 6

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?

My background consists of 38 years in education with the Memphis City School System. This career began with me acquiring a Teacher Assistant position in 1972. Once being employed in this position I immediately discovered my passion for teaching and learning. This prompted me to enroll in Memphis State University where I acquired a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education. After teaching for ten years I enrolled in Trevecca Nazarine College where I acquired a Masters in Administration and Supervision. This degree allowed me to pursue administrative positions with the district and I immediately assumed the role of Assistant Principal where I served for four years at Westwood and Grahamwood Elementary. In 1999 I was promoted to the position of Principal at Gardenview Elementary where I remained for the next nine years. Under my Leadership the school continued to make average yearly progress (AYP) and the students excelled academically. Parental Involvement soared, additional school adopters were acquired, and the school climate reached an all time high. In 2008, I was appointed to the position of Director of the division of Parent and Community Engagement by Superintendent Carol Johnson. Today, I continue to serve in this position.

It was the beginning of the MCS and City Council budgeting issue that lead me to attend each city council meeting three years ago. This allowed me the opportunity to witness the City Council in action along with their procedures. This is when I initially began to feel as if I was not being properly represented and was totally in awe at the manner in which the council spoke to tax paying citizens who had elected them.

I think the qualities that I bring to the council are excellent organizational skills, knowledge of budgets, creativity, data analysis, great communication skills (verbal, non-verbal, written), and most important of all a respect for all people.

I believe that my close association with people of all cultures on a daily basis differentiates me from all of the other candidates. I am accustomed to making decisions that affect the lives of other people. I have very high standards for myself and expect the same of others. My occupational background is an

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indicator of my persistence, dedication, and motivation to achieve at higher levels. I believe I would be a better representative for all of the people because I owe no one, can not be bought and have a spiritual goal that leads me.

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

I would like to see Memphis become a model for economic recovery, education, and also become an attraction for tourism. I believe that with the right people in office, Memphis can develop into a stronger and more efficient city that can be used as a model for advanced government. I would like to see tourist attractions that appeal to families and would boost our local economy.

In order to achieve change, we must invest in our youth, community, and city. We invest in our youth by supplying the best educational system that we can offer and appropriate funds where they can be effective and not wasted. The city needs to invest in career development courses, summer enrichment classes and community enhancement so that Memphis is more marketable to companies, organizations and tourist. I believe we must offer services to the community and market these tools so that we are ensuring that we are producing productive citizens. If we invest into our communities we will see a return on our investment through tourism and economic growth.

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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 would first ask my fellow council members to undergo some vital diversity training events and activities whereby the understanding of respect and its impact in the city occurs daily. I would help to identify ways to capitalize on diversity through communication, negotiation and feedback skill development. An open mind is more amendable to an opposing view point. Further, I would suggest that the Council and the business to be handled echo the following points: being honest with oneself; do not "point fingers" and value and respect the viewpoints, even if one disagrees. Diversity occurs naturally on so many levels. The key is to recognize it in ourselves as well as others to the extent that the differences and similarities can be maximized to find common ground. This type of mindset should go a long way towards looking for and finding the best in other people and competing issues. We must give government back to the community in which we serve. We should develop our personal group of community leaders, preferably from our neighborhood associations, which would provide input on this issue. The policy has made provisions for all of the citizens in Memphis and my plan is a simple one. Follow the policy and ensure that any additional policies include all of the people.

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

1. Education
2. Public Safety
3. Economic Development

As it relates to education, like many other metropolitan cities, our success as a neighborhood, a community and/or a city lies largely in the level of academic success achieved the citizens. Education is directly tied to earnings, levels of understanding, a strong economic base and the overall quality of life that can be experienced. Unfortunately, too many of our children leaving lower and higher educational institutions unprepared to meet the needs demanded by the world of work or sociability.

Crimes, neglect, poor teaching habits, not connecting with youth and watered down standards (just to name a few) are some of the issues which allow only 20% of some children to graduate from school.

As I relates to Public Safety, we are blessed with an educated and responsive Police, Fire and general public safety network. Unfortunately, theirs is mostly a responsive modality where we need more proactive initiatives to help protect and serve and keep safe our fellow citizens. Hopefully, the new Police Director's plan to provide more community policing partnered with local community groups will help improve our criminal statistics. More partnerships and collaborative endeavors with existing neighborhood and community groups should be utilized to empower and address the myriad of problems faced by the citizenry daily with respect to Public Safety in general.

One cannot and should not overlook the importance of sound, creative and productive economic development if a city is to attain or maintain vitality and productivity. Progress in an economy or the qualitative measure of same usually defines economic development. Memphis needs to adopt new technologies, transition from an agriculture-based to and technological and/or industry based economy to improve in the standards of the city in general. The big question becomes how, especially in these trying, global economic times.

The job rests with the sustained, concerted efforts of policymakers like the Council as well as the community to promote a standard of living and economic health in specific areas of the city. We should support and help implement multiple areas such as development of human capital, environmental sustainability, social inclusion, health, safety, literacy and other worthwhile initiatives. Economic development tends to be policy intervention endeavors with aims of economic and social well-being of the citizenry. We should capitalize on those entities (Fed Ex, International Paper, etc.) which are the bellwethers and flag ships of city.

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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?

The city policy making agencies should be at the forefront promoting workable plans for city growth. They should speak as one voice in such areas. The following ventures are what I would suggest with the necessary feedback, discussion and elaboration being provided for each endeavor:

- Increase in the capital stock of the city.
- Advances in technology
- Work toward improvement in the quality and level of literacy which have been historically touted as principal causes of economic growth.
- Sustainable and sound environmental issues addressed and embracing of new technology in this regard.
- Inclusion of the diverse voices in the city with their suggestions and implementation strategies.

I would support and promote a collaboration with Memphis Businesses to provide a summer youth employment program for Memphis teens as well. I believe the role the City of Memphis government in promoting the economic development for the community is great. It will not be easy and will require out of the box thinking. Their role is to specifically approve any pilot programs for any companies it will also require the government to be just and fair and every decision made should be in the best interest of all the people and not using geographic location as a determining factor. Zoning, business

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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?

In short, I encourage small business development and would like for all communities to be able to operate and sustain independently. I would strengthen and support existing neighborhood by sponsoring programs which allow those communities to have active roles in what transpires in the neighborhood; hold frequent town hall meetings to obtain information about their problems and successes. Support what works and find collaborative means to address problems peculiar or generic to their neighborhoods. Empowering the urban core neighborhood members allows them to play an integral role in solving the issues with the help of elected officials, and the citizens themselves.

As it relates to barriers to community redevelopment, one should first start with an accurate picture of attitudinal perceptions, real environmental barriers and funding issues.

The blight issues should be properly handled by those city agencies designed to address these types of issues as a first start. Due to home vacancy rates across, we could pattern our solutions after the banks of Americas who have decided, in some neighborhood to tear down the homes and donate the land for parks, green spaces and gardens. We should look at what other cities are doing in this regard, and mimic those projects that suit our city.

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

In a nutshell, the greatest obstacle to growth of any kind in this city is misperceptions, and an unwillingness to be creative in a collaborative fashion to address all the ills, not just those of certain neighborhoods. The shortsightedness of citizens, lack of faith in the city fathers and a general malaise contribute to an attitude where people don't like their city or its leaders. Mindsets must be changed. Negativity in thoughts breeds negative results.

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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 the legislative body working in conjunction with the Mayor to move the city forward. It is the council's responsibility to approve the operating budget, regulate property taxes, approve capital improvement projects, approve budget for MCS as well as approve Mayor recommended appointees.

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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?

Elected officials must support stiffer sentences for repeat offenders. However, there is a direct correlation between a lack of education and jobs to the crime rate. Therefore, changes must be made to curtail the crime rate such as: bringing more jobs to the city and having more alterative career and technical training options offered in public schools for those who do not plan to enter into 4 year educational institutions.

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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 absolutely have nothing in my past to hide.

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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. I think this policy is sufficient and holds all officials accountable for their ethical responsibilities. I would suggest those in violation of this policy be held accountable for the fullest extent of the law.

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

The responsibility for the funding of Memphis City Schools actually lies with the county. Two courts ruled for the city to pay funding to Memphis City Schools in order for it to reach maintenance of effort. Regardless of both court rulings the city did not submit funding until the MCS Board voted to delay the opening of schools indefinitely. This entire fiasco could have been avoided if both parties utilized common sense in recognizing the fact that the children are here and they must be educated. Too much time was wasted with adults exercising their power without any real focus on the best interest of the children.

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

The City Council presently has no direct responsibility for making the bidding process transparent and equitable. The City of Memphis' Purchasing Department is responsible for all procurements, and all bided contracts for the city must be approved by the Mayor. However, the Council can make recommendations for the consideration of the administration to assure the process is more equitable and transparent.