

Coalition for a Better Memphis Candidate Questionnaire Memphis City Council

Silvia Cox – District 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 have lived in Memphis for over 34 years, and I have worked in Information Technology for over 30 years. I grew up in southern Illinois and received my Bachelor's Degree, in Music Education, from Harding University in 1969. I moved to Memphis in 1977 -- after spending some time in graduate school at the University of Memphis, I made a career change to computer programming and completed a 2-year degree in Data Processing at Southwest Tennessee Community College (formerly State Technical Institute). After working for 2 small businesses and then 4 years at Schering-Plough, I was hired by Federal Express in 1988 ('left' FedEx in April 2009). I have been working as a Contractor (IT) at Accredo Health since September 2009.

I have no ties or commitments to any professional business people or politicians. I am just a citizen of Memphis, and I want to represent the citizens of Memphis who want changes that will ensure that our city is governed responsibly, competently, and with honesty and integrity. My 30 years of experience with IT project development means that I have good analytical, evaluation, and organizational skills. I am experienced with evaluation of changes, additions, or deletion of software projects for a large corporation. I believe I can apply those skills to my role as a City Council member.

There have been no Caucasian women on the City Council since Carol Chumney. I want to bring more diversity to the City Council and also bring a new, fresh approach to the city's problems. Questions are being asked by the citizens that are not receiving answers (budget, MAS, homeless, etc.). The Mayor's promise of openness and transparency needs to be kept and consistently fulfilled.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: _____ Sylvia Cox _____

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

The city is still divided on many levels. I believe that the city and its citizens can be united in purpose if everyone believes in doing the right things and doing the things that are in the best interest of the city and its citizens. This can be accomplished when everyone can put the needs of others (the city, its citizens) above their own needs.

The city needs to improve its fiscal responsibilities and accountability. There should be other areas where the budget can be trimmed besides pay cuts and parks and senior centers. Changes are needed regarding the pension system (city and MLG&W) and the health care system which could possibly save the city tens of millions of dollars.

I want to support opportunities for citizens to be involved in their communities and thus be more involved in the process of city government.

If I am elected to this office, I will be able to give it my full-time attention. I want to be as involved as possible in all aspects of city government and with the citizens of my district.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: _____ Sylvia Cox _____

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?

While I do not yet have a specific plan of action, I believe in equality for all. People should be evaluated for their talents, skills, and abilities regardless of race, age, gender, 'class', or sexual orientation. I will do whatever I can to ensure fair treatment of all citizens of Memphis who are employed or desire to be employed by the city or any private employers in the city.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: _____ Sylvia Cox _____

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

Fiscal responsibility and better management of the budget, especially in this economy.

Working through and successfully resolving all of the issues regarding the surrender of the MCS charter and funding for city (county) schools). In tandem, the education opportunities for our children.

More opportunities for jobs, improving the quality of life for all Memphians.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

Name: _____ Sylvia Cox _____

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 believe the city should be actively involved in bringing businesses into our area. The city should work with the county, the local Chamber and with other local governments in our area to promote the advantages of doing business in Memphis and the surrounding area.

I support the newly created Industrial Development Board for the City of Memphis and County of Shelby Tennessee (EDGE). I am hopeful that the work of this board will lead to new businesses and job growth in the Memphis area.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

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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?

Some possibilities for fostering and promoting citizen involvement in their neighborhoods – promote events that would engage people to discuss the state of their neighborhoods and the city; promote neighborhood events that foster involvement and people getting to know each other.

Fighting blight has been hampered by recent budget cuts and layoffs in Code Enforcement. One avenue regarding the blight problem is being developed by the Neighborhood Alliance (a group to build a consensus agenda across neighborhoods for the improvement of all our communities). They want the city to participate in a state law (from 2010) that allows (does not mandate) the city to contract directly with Community Groups and Neighborhood Associations for the purpose of cleaning and cutting overgrown vacant lots. The alliance is in the process of developing a plan that can be presented to the city. I believe this is an excellent way to unite neighbors and strengthen our neighborhoods and communities.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

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

There is still some racial and socio-economic divisiveness in the city. Until everyone can look beyond those divisions and see Memphians as a people with many of the same goals, needs, and problems, we will continue to struggle to work together for improving and revitalizing our neighborhoods, communities, and our city.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

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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 of the City. The Council authorizes public improvements and expenditures, adopts regulations and ordinances, manages the finances and taxes of the city, and performs other related legislative tasks. The Council should set policy on issues that are responsive to the needs and requests of the citizens. The Council should also focus on the city's goals, projects, and long term issues.

With consideration to the 'checks and balances' of government, the Mayor and City Council should work together as much as possible to ensure efficient city operations and excellent service to the citizens. When differences occur, they should be able to work together to analyze, evaluate, and determine a solution that is in the best interest of the city and its citizens.

There should be open communication and exchange of information and ideas between the city and the county and between the city and the various boards and commissions. At risk of being repetitive, when these entities consider the best interests of the city and its citizens above themselves, they can work together to recommend and/or make positive changes to improve our communities and our city.

MEMPHIS City Council Questionnaire 2011

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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?

I support the Memphis/Shelby County Crime Commission and Operation Safe Community. They have a comprehensive list of strategies that need support. There is no easy remedy for the causes of crime, many of which that begin when children are not mentored at home, at school, or in the community. The economy and unemployment are also contributing factors that are not easily mitigated.

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

Yes.

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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 do support the local ethics ordinance. I believe it is sufficient with one exception – while specific violations may subject to Tennessee law or the city Charter, I think that the fines defined in the penalties should be higher.

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

This issue is definitely "in flux" due to the surrender of the MCS Charter. Until all of the 'charter surrender' issues are resolved – via the courts – the city needs to continue to fulfill its current responsibilities. I am in the process of researching, in detail, both the city budget and the MCS budget. I need to be more knowledgeable in this area before I can speak to specific ideas or suggestions for funding the schools.

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

Mayor Wharton has increased transparency by making more aspects of government readily available to the public, including successful bids or proposals for city work or city purchases, all contracts executed by the Mayor, a list of city contractors, the value of the city's pension fund, and total bonded debt.

It is difficult to navigate, on the city's website, to find information on active requests for proposals and how to submit and RFP.

Any City Council members that are aware of or are a part of the RFP, contracts, and/or bidding process should monitor those processes to ensure that they are as transparent as possible to the public and to ensure compliance with all the rules and procedures.