

DC for Democracy 2012 DC Council Candidate Questionnaire

Muriel Bowser
DC City Council, Ward 4

1. Why are you running for City Council, and if (re)elected, what are the priority areas you intend to concentrate on in the near term?

I am running for City Council for two reasons – I love my Ward and my city, and while much has been achieved there is so much more that can be done. Near term issues that are absolute priorities for me are:

- Major school modernizations are set to begin in the Ward (e.g. – Coolidge and Roosevelt High Schools) and done well they can impact generations to come.
- Bringing new jobs to the residents of Ward 4.
- Increasing affordable housing, especially for senior residents.
- Continuing to improve both safety and services for the residents of Ward 4.
- Restoring respect for the DC Government, in particular the DC Council.
- Continuing to seek equality for all DC residents and the city itself in terms of voting rights.
- Managing economic development that increases the city's tax base while at the same time addresses the desires of the Ward.
- Continue working with MPD to keep our crime rate lower and more officers on our streets.

2. With unemployment, homelessness, and general economic distress at historically high levels, do you favor increasing safety net spending in future budgets? If yes, which programs should be given highest priority?

DC must manage its spending in a way that reduces overlap, increases efficiencies and maximizes federal grants and reimbursements. These cost savings should be directed to increased support the most vulnerable citizens of our city. I have always been an advocate for those services that impact children and families that meet basic needs of housing, nutrition, education and safety. I will continue this advocacy if I am returned to the council

3. Do you consider the District's total current budget to be too large, too small, or about right? Please explain.

Overall I consider it about right – but not efficient or effective in best serving the residents. The city's residents cannot afford any more taxes nor can our small businesses. What we all can afford is more effective evaluation of how we are spending our dollars and more discernment of the results achieved. We must make a focused effort to maximize federal government grants and reimbursements. All too often we hear of dollars being returned to the federal government due to our inability to spend the funds. As the chair of the Government Operations Committee, I have been focusing on the agencies of which I have oversight to ensure that they are increasing their efficiency and that they are maximizing federal dollars.

4. Last year, income taxes for those earning above \$350,000 were increased from 8.5% to 8.95%, subject to a "sunset" provision after 4 years. With this temporary increase, all taxpayers earning between \$40,000 and \$350,000 remain subject to the 8.5% rate. Do you believe this is fair? If not, what would you propose?

I do not support increasing taxes. I have consistently advocated wiser management of our current city resources.

5. What recently revitalized DC neighborhood would you suggest as the best model for the city as a whole, and why?

Petworth is revitalizing in a remarkable way and in a way that should be a model for the City. Citizen participation has been the hallmark of Petworth's transformation. Petworth residents set the stage for smart revitalization by demanding transit-oriented, dense development above the Metro station. From the beginning residents have stood up for smart, transit-oriented development and other enhancements that build on the Petworth Metro stop. The infusion of public and private investment near the Metro station, the implementation of Great Streets Georgia Avenue, along with the production of housing at all income levels right on Georgia Avenue has signaled to retailers large and small that Georgia Avenue is on its way back and the transformation begins in Petworth. Investments in key public facilities, including the Petworth Library, continue to attract Ward 4 residents of all ages to a beautiful historic and modern learning and community environment. I am proud to have played a key role in Safeway's commitment to building a modern, new Petworth store with housing above, reclaiming the blighted former home of Billy Simpson's restaurant, which will soon open as Chez Billy's.

6. If (re)elected, what will you do to create and protect affordable housing for both home-buyers and tenants, and alleviate homelessness?

I am proud of my record in producing more affordable housing for the residents of Ward 4. This includes Park Place at the Petworth Metro, The Residences at Georgia Avenue, Three Tree Flats, VIDA Senior residences, Fort View, Webster Gardens, and The Tewksbury. I have also fought for affordable housing for seniors and veterans at the site of Walter Reed. These projects and many more have delivered hundreds of units of affordable housing. I will continue to work with the DC Housing Finance Agency, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Housing Authority and the development community to deliver additional much-needed affordable units. It is also important to protect the funding available in the Housing Production Trust Fund and closely monitor the projects currently in the pipeline to ensure that they are delivered as promised.

7. Do you think reform in the DC public schools is headed in the right direction? Explain your answer.

I think that school reform is headed in the right direction. I would like to see that reform move at a faster pace.

8. How do you suggest that we repurpose the large number of school properties that have been closed over the past few years? Cite specific schools/communities as examples, if possible.

I believe school buildings should stay in the educational portfolio unless absolutely not needed. There are numerous Charter schools looking to use DC Public Schools or higher educational programs such as UDC, or pre-school providers in need of space. The Council needs to work with each neighborhood and ANCs stakeholders to insure that uses meet the needs of neighborhoods and residents. It is possible some campuses might be able to include additional uses in addition to schools, such as a library, adult training, or health services. Two schools were surplusd in my tenure on the Council. For the former Clarke School, I proudly supported along with the community the location of a high-performing Charter school—E.L. Haynes. Rudolph Elementary School was also closed. The community has valued the large recreational spaces there. The government has also entertained a senior community there. High-quality charter schools have also expressed interest. We must work together to get the building back into productive use in a manner that supports the community.

9. What are the most important steps that need to be taken to reform the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority?

As the district's representative to the WMATA board, I have been clear that rider satisfaction and safety are our first priority. We must continue to have world class managers that bring, vision, creativity and leadership to the day-to-day running of the authority. Clearly our biggest challenge is making the required capital improvements to the system. This will require regional cooperation and additional resources by the federal government.

10. Do you support funding the DC statehood campaign in the 2013 budget? If so, what amount would you support and for what purposes?

I strongly favor supporting the DC statehood campaign with funding. I favor seeking some national pr campaign that can best capture the message of equality and the right of DC voters to be recognized. There needs to be a national public education campaign – print, social media, tv, and other – that has a unified theme and marketing strategy to most maximize both awareness and action nationally on this issue.

11. Do you believe that the current DC Council represents the interests of the broad public? If not, what segments of the public are underrepresented?

I represent the broad interests of the residents of Ward 4 and the entire city. I am proud to represent a Ward rich with diversity on all levels, age, income, housing type, religion, sexual orientation, and language. I make every effort to get the pulse of the people I represent in a variety of ways, including constant contact with ANC commissioners, civic association presidents, and other community groups. We make an extra effort to reach out to segments of our community who we know are underrepresented in traditional public forums- the elderly without internet access, immigrants, the working poor and children.

12. Do you support the creation of an independent ethics commission with members nominated by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council, as provided for

in the newly enacted ethics reform legislation? Please explain your position.

I am proud to have authored this legislation and obviously support the establishment of the new entity.

13. Unlike most states, the District allows entities under contract with or soliciting contracts from the city to contribute to political campaigns. Is this a problem which future legislation should address, and, if so, how? Should DC ban all corporate contributions?

I have been a consistent advocate for full disclosure and transparency of all campaign contributions and will continue to work on the Council to ensure that all contributions meet that requirement.

14. Do you support the use of Constituent Service Funds (CSFs)? If so, why? If not, would you be willing to work for their elimination?

I support constituent service funds as they are currently defined by the recently enacted legislation.

15. What should DC do to improve its job-training programs?

Job training should be a part of benefit packages for appropriate economic development projects. We need to also ensure that community based organizations that deliver front-line job training services are efficient and meeting the goals of the city. UDC and the school system need to accelerate its job training/vocational offerings.