

DC for Democracy Questionnaire
April 2014 Primary, Ward 1 (Democrat)
Jim Graham

ECONOMY & JOBS

1. Given the strong economic and population growth in recent years, we can all agree that this city is now a hot place to live and work. Going forward, what criteria should justify the use of DC taxpayer funds for economic development?

Last year the Council adopted the Tax Abatement Financial Analysis (TAFA) proposed in the Mayor's Budget Support Act. The TAFA provides an important set of criteria for the Council and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer to collect and analyze when considering tax exemptions and abatements to help promote economic development - - especially in under-resourced neighborhoods in the city.

These criteria include some of the following questions which I have always supported and frankly, asked of developers even before the TAFA.

Is the economic development a priority for the city? The ward?

To what extent is a subsidy needed to help ensure the development goes forward?

What are the costs of the subsidy and what are the benefits?

To what extent will the development help foster investments in affordable housing and housing opportunities for very low income families?

How many temporary construction jobs will be produced and how many permanent jobs can be produced in developments that include retail.

I have supported the use of tax abatements to help promote development in Ward One and throughout the city. I have also opposed tax incentives and questioned others. I was opposed to the use of District funds to build Nationals Stadium and I have made clear my questions and reservations regarding the proposed land swaps to build a soccer stadium.

Finally, funding for New Communities Initiatives that have begun and new initiatives have stalled while private investments in upscale, market rate housing has skyrocketed. We are seeing throughout the country that New Communities can and do work. New Communities increase housing and commercial density, as well as public services, in housing communities where there is a high density of public housing.

I will work with the Mayor to see how public investments could help leverage private investments to get this initiative back on track - - especially at Park Morton. I would like to see a similar New Communities at Garfield Terrace and Ledroit Park / Kelly Miller.

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2. The tipped minimum wage has been frozen at \$2.77/hr in DC for over 20 years. Meanwhile, the Minimum Wage Act left out the issue of tipped minimum wages. Would you support an increase in the tipped minimum wage, and to what level?

I want to ensure that all tipped workers get the benefit of the increase in the minimum wage which was passed in December and which I strongly supported. The minimum wage increase is a very important victory for workers in the District and will make our minimum wage one of the highest in the nation. All workers, including tipped workers, are entitled to earn minimum wage, by law. The way that tipped workers get short shrift is when the restaurant owner isn't monitoring to be sure that the sum of \$2.77 plus tips adds up to minimum wage for the worker.

The bill that passed includes several important enforcement provisions including a provision requiring restaurant owners to provide quarterly data to DOES, showing paid wages and tipped wages for all workers in the establishment. This will allow enforcement and penalties for establishments that fail to pay the minimum wage or fail to report. These provisions, however, are subject to appropriation. If the enforcement provisions are not funded, I would then support an increase in the tipped minimum wage-- probably to 50% of minimum wage -- phased in over several years.

HOUSING

3. Many neighborhoods in this ward are experiencing a rapid influx of new residents. How do you propose to preserve a sense of community and appropriate services for long-term residents?

Ward 1 is a very special place and the most diverse in the District. The long-term residents of Ward 1 are very engaged and have been an integral part of the dynamic changes of the Ward. All sections of Ward 1 particularly LeDroit Park and Pleasant Plains are very proactive in maintaining a sense of community. For example a strong example of community is the Common Good Farm in LeDroit Park which provides agricultural programming for youth as well as free food for the underserved. Another example of community is the building of parks and recreation centers, The Park at LeDroit, Bowen YMCA, Bruce Monroe, just to name a few are stellar examples of us maintaining and growing a 21st century community. Ensuring resident tax dollars provide services is a duty I take very seriously. I immediately respond to resident concerns, and I communicate directly with agencies to track services requested. I have and will continue to seek the guidance of all of my constituency on a myriad of issues. While we have indeed seen significant change and new development, long-term residents as well as new have been and will continue to be an integral part in our decision making process and our growth. Listening to and learning from the community is why I am committed to Ward 1.

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4. How do you define affordable housing? What are your priorities short-term and longer-term, for remedying the affordable housing crisis in the District?

With over 700 homeless families currently at DC General Shelter, the need and absence of true affordable housing in the District has never been so great or so evident. We can no longer afford to have separate conversations about emergency shelter provision and affordable housing. The two are irrevocably linked. In addition to developing and implementing a strategy to address the current crisis, we must have a long term plan.

Affordable housing will vary from family to family but I personally believe that no family should spend more than 30% - 50% of their household income on housing. Certainly, anything over 50% does not leave any family with enough to actually live on.

Make no mistake, we are in the midst of a crisis and need to employ both short and long term strategies. The short-term strategy must include the following components:

- An immediate and thorough assessment of a family's needs;
- effective case management;
- referral and connection to TANF employment Program vendors;
- proper administration of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Program, and the Rapid Re-housing Program (RRH) which are key to assisting the movement of families out of shelter;
- adequate staffing levels and training; and
- A commitment of the necessary resources to ensure that the strategy is taken to scale.

It is estimated that approximately 10% of homeless families need PSH; 80% need RRH; and 10% need one-time rental assistance through ERAP. I believe that a short-term plan must include additional funding allocations to these housing support programs. Additionally, we must make sure that as slots become available for programs such as PSH, families are moved in immediately. This is why I co-introduced legislation with Anita Bonds, which was co-sponsored by the majority of the Council, to ensure that this occurs.

The vast majority of the families currently in shelter are considered extremely low income with an income range at or below 30% of AMI. In terms of a long-term strategy, I believe that this is the income level that we should focus our affordable housing expansion efforts. Additionally, we also need to discuss the best way of utilizing the Local Rent Supplement Program and other affordable housing subsidy programs.

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We cannot continue to spend millions of dollars to house families at DC General, hotels, and now recreation centers. Our current approach to providing emergency shelter is simply unsustainable. Not only is it not the best use of our city's resources, but more importantly, it cannot be the best that we can do as a city for our most vulnerable families.

5. 60% of DC residents are renters. Do you propose to update and improve enforcement of rent control laws, which apply to an ever-decreasing share of DC's rental units? If so, how?

I have a longstanding history of supporting and strengthening rent control laws in the District including the period when I chaired the committee that had oversight of rent control issues. One important piece of legislation that I co-introduced was the Rent Control Reform Act of 2006 which established tenant disclosure requirements for the rent charged on a unit during the preceding 3 years and the basis for any increase. Enforcing rent control laws is critical to ensuring that District residents have affordable housing options.

Within the last year, I introduced two bills regarding rent control. One of the bills reformed the process for voluntary agreement approval. Voluntary agreements are one of five rent increase petition options. The bill guarantees tenants the ability to have their objections over a voluntary agreement heard before the Office of Administrative Hearings. The bill also repeals passive approval and automatic approval of voluntary agreements.

The second bill I introduced last year limited the amount of the conditional rent increase up to five percent of the rent charged for any unit affected by a hardship petition. Under our rent control law, landlords are permitted to file what is known as a hardship petition to seek approval to earn a 12% rate of return on their rental property investment. When hardship petitions languish before the rent administrator, the landlord may take a conditional rent increase until the petition is considered.

As a member of the committee that has oversight of these issues, I have already begun working with that committee's Chairperson to move the legislation forward. Strong rent control laws in the District have always remained a priority for me.

TAXATION

6. The Tax Revision Commission was presented with clear, official data showing that the District's current tax system is regressive. The Commission has recommended some proposals to reduce this regressivity. Are you comfortable with their proposals in this regard? What further changes would you propose, if any?

First, I want to acknowledge the work of the Commission, the process in which they explored and discussed options with the public, and most importantly, the unanimous vote that the

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recommendations received. Getting a unanimous vote on such a complex and controversial issue such as taxes is a testament to the Commission and Mayor Anthony Williams' leadership in particular.

Overall, I am pleased with the recommendations. Especially with the following:

1. Establishing a new bracket for middle income earners between \$40,000 - \$60,000 for singles and \$40,000 - \$80,000 for families.
2. Aligning DC's tax filing choices with the federal government choices.
3. Increase the Earn Income Tax Credit to 100% of the Federal Tax Credit for childless workers.
4. Establish a tax line for online purchases.
5. Local service fee at \$25 for each employee.

I look forward to receiving the Commission's final report to the Council in March. However, I would like for the Commission to revisit its recommendation to reduce the tax on the very highest earners from 8.95% to 8.75%.

ELECTION REFORM

7. In order to reduce the influence of large contributors on legislation, a number of states and localities have turned to public financing. Do you in general favor public financing, and if so, what (s) do you recommend?

I have co-sponsored two bills that focused on establishing public financing systems in the District. The first bill, in 2012, focused on establishing a task force to develop recommendations for a public financing system and the most recent bill established a public financing system. The latter bill has yet to go through the hearing process, but I am eager to see the bill move forward in order to develop a model that best fits the District.

I have always been vocal about reforming the campaign finance system to keep large donors from monopolizing the campaign process. Last December, in an effort to expose corporate ties to big donors, I moved an amendment to a comprehensive campaign finance reform bill that would require all donors to disclose any connection to contracts with the District. The amendment did not pass, but I remain resolved in my efforts to create an equal playing field in our election process.

EDUCATION

8. The percentage of children in traditional public schools has declined dramatically in DC and is now, at 56%, the third lowest in the nation. Should we be concerned about this trend? If

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so, what should be done to halt or reverse it? If not, what changes would you propose to accommodate to the trend?

I am concerned about the trend - - and at the same time I think Mayor Gray and Chancellor Henderson agree - - the competition is healthy and good between DCPS and the public charter schools (PCS) and can provide the best results for our kids. We are seeing improvements throughout the system, at the elementary and high school levels. Enrollments at Bruce Monroe and Harriet Tubman Elementary Schools is tremendous and very encouraging.

There is no question in my mind that the lack of vision for our Middle Schools and our middle school aged students is driving the move towards public charter schools. I am especially concerned by the lack of vision that was demonstrated by DCPS when it decided to consolidate Garnet Patterson with Cardozo. Today, we have 10 year olds mixing with 23 year olds on that brand new campus and facility. We have high school teachers teaching middle school aged teachers for the first time in their careers. The co-location of Garnet Patterson at Cardozo epitomizes the dilemma and lack of vision that DCPS has for our middle school aged children. No one seems to know how long a middle school program will exist at Cardozo. Or is it permanently located there? It is very unfortunate and frankly, dangerous, not to have a solid plan for this age group of children that are already precarious and vulnerable in their human development. DCPS needs a plan.

I am proud of all of our DCPS and PCS schools in Ward One and those schools that serve our Ward One families in other wards.

DC has long ago made a commitment to “choice” when picking a school for our children - - we have public charter schools, lotteries that allow parents to move their children out of boundary, application schools. We also have the Congress imposed Opportunity Scholarship Program. At the same time, DCPS has initiated a very comprehensive review of current boundaries and feeder patterns and new boundaries and feeder patterns will be established in the 2015 – 2016 school year.

The trend that I support the most and have been encouraged by over the last year is the alignment of standards and policies that is occurring between DCPS and PCS. I believe such alignment helps everyone.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

9. What would you do to improve job and living prospects for the high number of returning citizens in DC?

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While Chairperson of the Committee on Public Works and Transportation, I identified funding to hire 75 ex-offenders to work at DPW Street and Alley Cleaning Maintenance. That funding of \$2.5 million for those positions has been sustained by the Department to this day.

I co-sponsored the original legislation that established Office of Ex-Offender Affairs and my Chief of Staff served on the original commission.

I was an original co introducer of the “ban the box” law applicable to DC government. And most recently I co introduced a bill to extend it generally in the city.

As Chair of Committee of Human Services with oversight of DYRS, I have worked closely with DYRS to improve the quality and quantity of community based services for juveniles.

DC is committed to rehabilitation in the least restrictive setting - - as long as that community based setting is safe for both the young person and public safety is not at risk.

The focus I bring to youth re-entry and most likely similar to adult re-entry is based on the following four principals.

1. The youth must feel safe and the community cannot be at risk.
2. The youth is stable either with the family of origin, foster family, or group setting. Reconnection with family is integral to long term successful rehabilitation. Work opportunities often make stability more viable and sustained.
3. The youth must be healthy. Evidence based substance abuse and mental health programs must be available during the rehabilitation and post-commitment phases.
4. The youth must have the firm belief that the system is fair and just. Young people especially, can perceive when they are being pulled and pushed in different directions by a bureaucracy and a judicial system that often do not work together. In far too many cases, I have seen the systems that are supposed to help - - and done more harm than help.