

AFRO American Newspaper Questionnaire

Please list (along with years, number of terms and locations) the elected offices previously held.

Baltimore City Council, 14th District, 2 terms, 2004-current; President of Baltimore City Council. 2 terms, 1987-95; and, City Council, former 2nd District, 2 terms, 1975-83.

Please answer each question as completely as possible, using as much space as you need.

DEVELOPMENT

Do you have a viable vision for the development of Baltimore City beyond the borders of downtown Baltimore?

Downtown is traditionally the hub of generating the businesses that generate jobs. Unfortunately, accelerating in the 1980's, we lost many of our headquarter companies and the employment and investment they represented, including the thriving restaurant and retail businesses --- and their employees --- which were required to serve many more downtown employees than we have today. Hundreds of neighborhood workers have lost their jobs and small businesses in that disinvestment, adversely affecting our neighborhoods themselves.

Meanwhile, Baltimore had already lost most of the manufacturing jobs on which hardworking, blue-collar families relied for earning a living decent enough to buy a house and a car and send their children to college. Thousands of blue collar families, homeowners and retirees suffered permanent reversals which "reversed" the condition of the safe and clean neighborhoods in which they had taken such pride.

Both of these critical losses, of headquarter companies and manufacturing jobs, have directly affected the neighborhoods surrounding our downtown core, by depriving us of much of the investment capital, charitable giving and decent employment on which the City thrived.

In response to the loss of manufacturing employment, the City developed the Inner Harbor to replace manufacturing jobs with service jobs in hospitality and tourism, including retail, hotels, restaurants and entertainment.

My "vision" for development of Baltimore City beyond the borders of downtown Baltimore relates to the status of those "replacement" hospitality and tourism jobs as well as to the neighborhoods in which most of Baltimore resides.

- 1) We have all paid for the infrastructure required to transform the Inner Harbor and Inner Harbor East into the launching pad for decent jobs to replace those manufacturing jobs we lost. We must remember that those new jobs for City residents were the reason for these new developments and require, by law and covenant, that the jobs produced

approximate the jobs they replace by providing fulltime, living wage pay, with benefits, or their union negotiated equivalent. Part-time positions and minimum wages produce hundreds of “working poor” families too financially stressed and time-limited to help rebuild the neighborhoods where they reside.

- 2) Since so many residents of Baltimore neighborhoods work in retail, I urge vocal support for City Council approval of my pending legislation which requires that major Baltimore City retailers pay a minimum of Living Wage (\$10.59/hour) to all its employees. (City Council Bill # 10-0505, now languishing in Council’s Labor Subcommittee). Sales persons and cashiers are generally the least paid of retail employees, hundreds of whom reside in our neighborhoods
- 3) Right-size and right-price our Baltimore neighborhoods. We have lost population we will not replace. From the neighborhoods-up, we need to set realistic Citywide goals for adding to the current population of about 630,000. We then need to redevelop our neighborhoods accordingly, rehabbing some vacant houses for affordable homeownership and replacing others with newly built houses and community-managed green spaces which enhance livability and value.
- 4) Residents need a stake. Many suggest a “dollar-house” program to develop vacant, blighted properties into affordable homeownership. We have engaged in such homesteading on the high-end in Fells Point and Otterbein, for example, where historic restoration was required. If basic code compliance were the standard, costs would be lower and more affordable. In the past, the City had 3% loan funds from the federal government in support of dollar-house homesteading. This proposed effort would require a home-grown low interest loan pool, perhaps through voter-approved general obligation bonds.
- 5) Nationally, small businesses generate the most new jobs. In Baltimore, many of these small businesses are located in our neighborhoods where potential employees can get to work without a car. We need our City to focus its job-generating efforts and resources on assisting these small businesses to thrive and on providing incentives for local training and hiring --- as well as on supporting small business start-ups as an employment alternative for local entrepreneurs.
- 6) Neighborhoods must be made safe or residents will either flee or remain in fear. Our youth require relevant education, job training, recreation, mentoring and alternatives to the default associations which can lead from idleness to criminality. Providing these supports must become the major investment we make in each and every neighborhood’s development and survival.
- 7) Troubled neighborhoods require police “feet on the street,” that is, walking officers who know the residents, young and old, and whose familiarity generates a restoration of mutual trust and respect.

What do you propose to do to break the logjam on projects that benefit the residents in West Baltimore, namely State Center?

Seek to understand how this State Center development promotes the neighborhood restoration and local employment interests discussed above without diverting scarce resources from those priorities.

JOBS

The African-American employment rate continues to hover around 16 percent and the jobs available are being absorbed by those coming from out of state, leaving the rate unchanged. Do you have a plan for a program that will help people who need jobs the most be employed?

What the nation and our City really need is a federal reauthorization of the former CETA program which, in a past recessionary era, funded Baltimore City and other subdivisions across the nation to train and hire unemployed workers for limited two-year terms.

In Baltimore, hundreds of CETA workers handled diverse City government jobs, from customer service to trash collection, thereby earning a living while helping local government maintain basic City services in tough budget times.

With that training, work experience and track record, many CETA workers were hired permanently by the City and even by private employers as that era's recovery got underway.

That major jobs solution is beyond President Barack Obama's ability in this Tea Party era in which even Social Security payments are in jeopardy. But one recommendation is an all-out effort to re-elect President Obama in 2012 and work with his Administration and our Congressional delegation to enact "Jobs First" programs, including a 21st century CETA.

Right now, to the extent legally possible, the City of Baltimore must promote local employment by incorporating local employment training and hiring goals into City contracts for service and construction projects.

For our younger generation of the unemployed, we need to improve the State's GED program so that a high school degree can be achieved in a more reliable and timely manner. The transfer of GED out of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and into Licensing and Regulation was a transfer deprived of the resources and expertise to effectively undertake the job on behalf of so many Marylanders requiring this certification for even entry-level job eligibility.

In addition, our local community colleges are nearby and recognized education and training centers which are out-of-reach to many unemployed men and women who lack the funds for tuition. In a broader sense, for those young high school graduates seeking careers, not just jobs, hundreds accepted to four-year colleges and universities cannot afford the tuition and board required.

What a wasted opportunity if we as a City and State ignore these "dreams deferred." For the future of Baltimore City and its job and business growth, we must establish a major private/public coalition of funding partners to help individual high school graduates and their families identify and secure the "gap funding" which enables them to attend the colleges which accept them, perhaps in exchange for a pledge to return to Baltimore after graduation, for at least

five years, to mentor the next generation of college-bound high school graduates and help expand the career-ready “brain pool” which will attract businesses to Baltimore City.

EDUCATION

The viability of charter schools programs in other jurisdictions have been challenged; are the ones in Baltimore City living up to the obligation? If not, why? If so, how can they be improved to expand the positive impact on education in the city?

In general, charter schools approved by the Baltimore City Public Schools have been successful in providing choices beneficial to the City’s children and their families. Many are excellent. One concern is the higher per pupil allocation which charter schools negotiated with State support and a fear of funds being redirected away from our traditional schools’ per pupil allocation.

On the other hand, charters are responsible for securing and supporting the acquisition or leasing of adequate facilities to house their schools, a major expense not borne by traditional schools. They also operate with limited time guarantees and periodic renewal requirements.

It is important for the School Board to continue to evaluate all our schools, including charters, and make changes when performance is below expectations. In this process, we will weed-out low-performing charters along with traditional schools.

How would you support and contribute to a strategy that would enhance the connectivity of the urban HBCUs to the surrounding areas so they can assist each other to improve the environment?

Councilman Robert Curran and I have long worked with local neighborhoods such as Original Northwood and Hillen Road (HRIA), with Northeast Development Alliance (NEDA), Senator Joan Carter Conway and the 43rd Delegation, and Morgan State University (MSU) to bring new vitality and productivity to the Northwood Shopping Plaza in Northeast Baltimore City.

Now that MSU has undertaken its redevelopment of the Hillen Road side of this block-long Plaza (the Hechinger portion), we are encouraged that the private owner of the Loch Raven side will be encouraged to support and invest in redevelopment of her half of the Plaza, hopefully based on a plan developed by MSU and the community with the guidance and charette leadership of the Neighborhood Design Center (NDC) and its architectural consultants.

Working together on this major revitalization project will engage MSU students, administrators, and faculty in partnership with the surrounding neighborhoods and with City government to transform a keystone location for us all.

CRIME

It has been suggested that the judicial criminal infrastructure is adequate for the jurisdiction but underutilized. How would you improve the implementation to make Baltimore City a safer city for its residents day and night?

I presume that “judicial criminal infrastructure” refers to the district and circuit court system. If so, I disagree that it is “adequate . . . but underutilized.” I am part of a year-old, volunteer Court Watch program active in the Northern Police District portion of my 14th District. Inspired by last year’s senseless killing of Hopkins researcher Stephen Pitcairn, Court Watch is a systematic tracking of court cases involving violent crimes, especially when the accused have repeated (and suspended) sentences for violent, armed crimes. We attend and track court hearings on such offenders and help neighborhood groups and victims submit Criminal Impact Statements (CIS) through the State’s Attorney’s Office to the presiding judges. Volunteer Court Watch Coordinator Steve Gewirtz, a retired MSU math professor, keeps in communication with our Court Watch list of neighborhood representatives and victims, alerting us to court hearing dates and explaining court actions taken, from postponements to sentencing, and what follow-up hearings to expect, if any.

I attend many district and circuit court hearings through this program, sometimes two or three a week, so I see how packed the court agendas are and how thinly spread both assistant state’s attorneys (ASA’s) and public defenders. With so many defendants per session, I truly admire how the judges, ASA’s and public defenders keep track and work so diligently on each case. I often wonder, however, how much the defendants can possibly understand about complex and formulaic proceedings which determine the course of their lives.

With our Court Watch program in place, the families of homicide victims feel “less lost” and better supported in their efforts to seek justice on their loved one’s behalf. We are working right now, for example, with the family of 19-year-old Tanise Ervin, the innocent homicide victim of a gang shooting on Gorsuch Avenue in Better Waverly.

It doesn’t bring back this promising young lady, an aspiring nurse, but it does put gang members on notice that the entire community is involved. (We have sat beside them in court proceedings.) Perhaps it will make the neighborhood safer, we hope. Court Watch does, however, make the community feel less helpless before the “revolving door” system so many citizens decry in conversations and at meetings. I would like to see it replicated in all nine police districts.

CLOSING STATEMENT

Please share any additional comments you have about your candidacy or issues.

My thanks to The Afro American Newspapers for your historic and ongoing leadership in “asking the right questions” and promoting justice and understanding within the Baltimore community. I appreciate your consideration of my candidacy for re-election to the Baltimore City Council, 14th District, and would be honored should you choose to endorse me.