

Coalition for a Better Memphis Questions
Berlin F. Boyd

1. QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND

1. Describe your qualification for holding the office of Shelby County Commissioner.

I am a third generation Memphian, I was appointed to fulfill the remaining City Council term from the vacancy left by my predecessor, Barbara Swearengen Ware in 2011. Throughout my life, I have demonstrated my commitment to serving others while repeatedly leading through diverse and challenging situations. I have initiated issues around economic development, job creation, housing and education. While on the council, I was instrumental in voting on several key issues. Amongst my proudest achievements were the renaming of Linden Avenue to Dr. M. L. King Jr. Avenue and creating programs to help spark inner city redevelopment and neighborhood stabilization. During my tenure I served on the Parks & Recreation and Memphis Light, Gas & Water committee. I have also served on numerous boards and currently sit on the Memphis/Shelby County Land Use and Control Board, Solid Waste Board, Shelby County Health, Education and Housing Facilities Board, and am a former member of the Memphis Area Realtors Association. I am also the former president of the Shelby County Young Democrats.

2. What events or experiences caused you to decide to run for this office?

The current political climate in Memphis/Shelby County is the reason I decided to run for County Commissioner in District 8. I am also running to offer proven leadership and to deliver the innovative solutions that Shelby County residents deserve. I believe in order for our city to attract the youngest and the brightest it must first elect representatives that look and think like them. With that being said, there is a tremendous need for new representation in District 8 and I want to be a part of creating a progressive and sustainable vision for our future. I find that serving on the Commission is an excellent way to do this.

2. VISION AND STRATEGIES

1. In your opinion, what are the three greatest issues (problems or opportunities) facing Shelby County in the next four years?

Education, jobs, and poverty are the three most significant challenges facing Shelby County in the next four years. Strengthening public schools is important. Sound investments in public education now will only strengthen our economy and improve our communities by creating a more educated workforce and offering our children alternatives to drugs and crime. Having a well trained, educated workforce also enables us to market our city to attract and retain businesses. Furthermore,

strategic investments in these three areas help to reduce reliance on government and social services build the workforce and strengthen Shelby County's economy with increase in consumer spending. By making these types of investments now we are able to have a direct impact on job creation and reducing poverty, which will also reduce crime in our neighborhoods.

2. How would you recommend we continue to pay down County debt and still fulfill the financial obligation of the County? What budget priorities must take precedence?

The only way to pay down County debt and still fulfill our financial obligation is by making tough decisions and some hard choices, which may require us to cut programs that are draining our resources, yet not providing a benefit to a large segment of our communities. Consolidating departments and services is something else to consider. Discussions about how to generate new revenue should be ongoing and addressed in a fair and equitable way to support our current tax structure, which includes individuals who work in our city and county, but don't pay taxes here.

3. What are your views regarding the best way to fund public education of Shelby County and Memphis Children?

My recommendation would be to take a comprehensive look at how we are currently funding public education, more specifically how much is allocated from our property and sales tax dollars. With increase in funds from the State as a result of changes made to the funding formula used to distribute funds to larger school districts and a boost in revenues from property taxes more emphasis should be placed on shifting priorities that focus on increasing funding to our school system. We can't expect our schools to be successful and our children to excel if we are not allocating proper resources to help them succeed.

4. Some people believe that urban communities should adopt policies that encourage what is called "smart growth." Do you believe Shelby County should have a general policy about new residential and commercial developments? What should the policy be?

I do believe smart growth policies are important when they are focused on creating livable neighborhoods that are pedestrian friendly and encourages healthy viable communities. We should adopt zoning policies and standards that incorporate an approach that supports and promotes environmental sensitivity, are economically viable, transit-oriented, and sustainable development. In terms of policy, for instance, we could offer incentives to developers who invest in brownfield and greenfield land. Another option is to consider form-based code zoning as a tool as it tends to preserve a communities assets while permitting a mixture of uses.

5. Are you satisfied with the economic growth (jobs and income) of Shelby County today? If not what should the county government do to improve economic development efforts? What incentives would you support or oppose be used to attract future economic development?

Employment is essential to economic growth. By supporting pro-jobs policies that attract the right mix of industries will help employ workers with varying levels of education and skills. We must also increase the number of job readiness and job training programs throughout Shelby County, which enables them to find jobs in developing industries. Community job program should offer some guarantee that the majority of employees hired within the company live in Shelby County. Moreover, our corporate citizens have to be willing to employ individuals with felonies in order to reduce the high unemployment rate within African American communities specifically. In segments of Memphis where unemployment is particularly higher working with firms in a way that incentivizes those that locate in these areas and hire long term unemployed workers is a measure I would also support to help link employers with job seekers.

More jobs are moving to where the people, talent, and quality of life are. We must focus on creating that environment by supporting countywide investments in education and building modern public infrastructure, which is a key driver of economic growth, prosperity and job creation. Infrastructure investments help address congestion, increase private-sector productivity, and improve the quality of life of our citizens. Policy is another identifiable economic development tool, if drafted properly policies can be used to spur economic development activities. For instance, adopting policies like business assistance living wage laws, which require businesses receiving public subsidies to pay workers wages above the poverty level, essentially linking labor standards to public development projects in addition to imploring good business principals and practices that can be translated into government. As County Commissioner I will make every effort to relieve the wasteful administrative burdens placed on businesses and encourage the entrepreneurial spirit that built this city.

3. IMPROVING THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

1. What do you regard as the greatest obstacle or barrier to economic growth in Shelby County today? What can the County Commission do to reduce that impediment?

As pointed out in another question, jobs (lack of) and poverty are two of the most significant challenges faced in Shelby County and can be attributed to being one of the greatest obstacles or barriers to economic growth in our county today. Both affect ones overall quality of life and lead to neglected crime infested neighborhoods if not addressed. To reduce this impediment, the County could shift its focus toward a strategy that removes legislative and regulatory barriers that deter economic

prosperity and encourage policies that help reduce poverty. This will require us to rethink existing policies and develop and implement new tools.

2. What is your philosophy about offering incentive to companies that are considering major new investments or job expansions in Shelby County?

To remain competitive incentives often times are necessary to attract companies with the caveat that there is a time and place for incentives. As County Commissioner I will always weigh the expected benefits with the expected cost and ultimately how it will impact the community. I believe we must implement basic requirements for companies that are up front and layout an agreement that is mutually beneficial to all parties. However, some flexibility is needed, as a “one shoe fits all” model isn’t reasonable. I will also add that it is my practice to use due diligence and good governance, as it is extremely important in assessing whether to engage in such an agreement.

3. What is your position on consolidation of city and county governments?

A consolidated government is a good idea in my opinion. City and county needs have evolved and so has the services each provide to citizens and how they pay for them. Our funding resources are decreasing; therefore we have to be innovative. A consolidated government reduces duplication of services and has the potential to provide a larger tax base. In terms of economic development, for instance you wouldn’t have to involve multiple jurisdictions essentially making the process more efficient. It is much easier to build a brand identity when you have a metropolitan government consolidated into one single government. It would also lesson the current inequalities we have between city and the suburban communities. With a consolidated government expanded services would likely be provided to areas not previously served.

4. When you complete your service as commissioner, what do you want your legacy to be?

I would like to be remembered as someone who truly made a difference and left an imprint on Memphis that is brighter for generations to come. I want people to look back and say, Commissioner Boyd was an honorable leader who worked tirelessly each day for the citizens of Shelby County and wholeheartedly invested what he had in achieving his goal of making Memphis a better place for everyone. That he understood how to be a collaborative, progressive and practical leader and brought integrity, leadership, and accountability to the office. Ultimately there are things I would like to see improved as it relates to education, job creation, and poverty and will use my time in office to focus on making improvements in these areas.