

COALITION FOR A BETTER MEMPHIS
Shelby County Commissioner Candidate Questionnaire
Election Date: May 6, 2014

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TO peggy@bettermemphis.org**

Name: David C. Bradford, Jr.

District for which you are running: District 2

Section 1: Qualifications and Background (2 questions)

Section 2: Vision and Strategies (4 questions)

Section 3: Improving the System of Government (4 questions)

1. QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND

- 1. Describe your qualifications for holding the office of Shelby County Commissioner.**

My background is in building design and engineering. This industry requires me to understand, and verify every aspect of a design before I put my seal on a set of plans for construction. It also requires me to understand highly technical and complex items and be able to explain them to an owner or client that does not have my technical background. I intend to use this ability to understand and inspect confusing and technical issues when reviewing all items that come before me as a county commissioner.

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

Over the past four years I have been serving on Mayor Luttrell's Young Professionals Council. During this time I have focused on local politics and the issues affecting young professionals. Last September I started attending the county commission meetings. Since September I have only missed a handful of the meetings and I have learned that Shelby County needs professional, diligent, and balanced leaders. I can provide all of these as County Commissioner.

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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?

The three greatest issues facing Shelby County in the next four years are Education, Workforce Development, and Government spending.

- **Education:** In 2013 the unified school system was put in place and the various municipalities were granted the right to start their own school districts. As these school systems move forward, it will be paramount that all of the systems work well together. Infighting over students, facilities, and finances will not benefit any of the children trying to get an education. The county commission should assist in making sure that each of the school systems has the support they need for success.

- **Workforce Development:** As EDGE works to attract new businesses to Shelby County, the county must be sure that the proper workforce is in place to fill the newly created positions. The county must help its citizens find the training needed whether that's a 2 year degree, or a specialized certification. EDGE can make Shelby County appear lucrative to many businesses, but without a properly developed workforce, the businesses will not thrive in Shelby County.

- **Reduction in Government Spending:** In an effort to keep taxes low, the county government must continue to work on reducing government spending. The county should look to see what services are non-essential, or what services can be provided at a lower rate with better results in the private sector. If the county can reduce spending and avoid raising taxes, it should prevent additional migration from the area.

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

The current administration has done a good job to reduce County debt and we must continue down this same path. As mentioned above, reduction in government spending through removal of non-essential services, or by allowing the private sector to provide these services will further help to reduce spending and allow more resources to be devoted to paying down the debt.

Priorities in the budget should be education and public safety.

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

Education is one of the county's main priorities and based on the Education Fund's 2014 proposed budget it will take 60% of all property taxes and will account for 30% of the county expenditures. The development of the municipal school districts will reduce the number of students in the Shelby County School system, and will also reduce the funding received by the county school system from the state. Since the School Board is in charge of spending, the County Commission will have no say in how the money is used. The current funding system follows the student and is based strictly on the student attendance. An alternate method would be to link the money to an incentive program to help boost performance. Changing the funding system at this time would be a horrible decision. The county and municipal school systems have enough to deal with in just getting set up. The funding model should remain the same until the bugs of the new school systems are worked out.

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? If so, what should that policy be?

Yes. Without a policy in place, communities can suffer from suburban sprawl which can lead to traffic issues, loss of property values, loss of green spaces, and overcrowding of schools. A good policy would be based on expected growth areas and would include:

- proper infrastructure to support the developments and environmental friendly ways to commute (bike lanes)
- proper layout of property types to make sure there is separation between dissimilar development types (avoid placing high commercial adjacent to high residential areas)
- proper protection of natural resources such as parks and streams
- proper planning for schools to prevent the need to bus children from one area of town to a completely different one
- incentives for developers to work in areas to remove blight from neighborhoods

SHELBY COUNTY COMMISSIONER CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

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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?**

No, I am not satisfied. EDGE has gone a long way to make it easier for companies looking to move into the area, but there still are not enough jobs to support the citizens. County government should support workforce development and help the Shelby County citizens find the training they need. A lot of the companies that have been moving to town need skilled laborers. Unfortunately the Shelby County work force does not possess the skills for these jobs.

I support incentives because our competition (other communities) is doing the same thing. If we don't match the incentives they are providing, then we won't have a chance of landing the company. The Payment In Lieu Of Taxes (PILOT) program is working well and should be continued, but only for companies that make sense to be in the Memphis area and can provide jobs for the citizens we have.

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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?**

Lack of workforce development and the education system are the county's two biggest challenges. Companies would be a lot more willing to move here if we could show them that we have an existing, strong, well trained workforce and a top notch education system for their kids. A good education system would also attract various entrepreneurs and their families looking to start a new business. The County Commission must support workforce development by developing programs to educate the citizens about training for their career. The commission should also work hand in hand with the county school board and the various municipal school boards to make sure both have the support they need to succeed.

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

Incentives for attracting companies to the area are going to be required whether the community agrees with it or not. The communities we compete with for companies on the move are providing similar incentives and Shelby County will have to match these offers if we expect companies to move here. The companies that we offer these incentives to need to be targeted and only offered to businesses that make sense for Shelby County.

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

This is a very touchy subject, especially for the citizens in the suburbs and municipalities. One of the reasons I moved to Collierville was to get away from City of Memphis Government. I don't think a full consolidation would ever be possible due the varying pay scales between each government and Shelby County residents do not want to accept the debt accrued by the city of Memphis. But functional consolidation of various areas is already taking place (EDGE, Shelby County Schools) and should continue. If both of the governments are offering similar services, it makes sense to combine those, especially if one system is more productive than the other. But once they are combined, both governments should share in the cost to run that group. Consolidation of some of the services offered by both governments would help cut the expenses of both governments.

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

When I complete my service as county commissioner I hope that I am remembered for bringing civility to the commission, thoughtfulness and diligence in my decisions, and having a passion to see Shelby County prosper.

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