

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

Name: Julie Ray

District for which you are running: District 8

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.

Shelby County embraces varied communities with their own specific needs. Having lived and worked in several parts of Shelby County I understand the differences in each community. I have lived in Bartlett, Arlington and the City of Memphis. For the past 16 years I have lived in Downtown Memphis, the district I hope to serve. The experience of owning, operating and closing a business within this community provided me with invaluable experience and a solid understanding of the specific needs and challenges of employees, employers and citizens who are part of our two-system government. I want to take my level of community involvement up a notch. I will never stop striving for the full potential of Memphis and Shelby County and I believe that serving on the Shelby County Commission for District 8 is how I can best contribute to my neighborhood, City and County that I love.

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

I have invested a large portion of my life to Downtown Memphis. I have taken an active role in creating a better quality of life for Downtown Memphis. The recent redistricting, making smaller districts, created an opportunity for me to be able to serve the area I have the most invested.

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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?

1. Economic growth

2. Environmental (quality of life) issues

3. Education

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?

I believe there is no one action that will pay down County debt while fulfilling financial obligations. While debt is down from a peak in 2006, it is a reality that property taxes are the major source of funding and schools receive the largest distribution of that funding. This creates opportunities for our priorities to be focused on these areas. Retaining and growing our population as well as our business tax base should be priority especially in a tri-state area like Shelby County. Encouraging an atmosphere for home ownership and business growth while becoming more efficient and innovative will be key components in budget matters.

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

A large portion of funding comes from the State of Tennessee. This will not change. Shelby County should be the sole source of local funding.

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. Often, very minor and basic decisions can impact a community for better or worse. I have always been a proponent for “smart growth.” While on the Design Review Board of the Downtown Memphis Commission, our board had an opportunity to meet with consultants regarding design and sign guidelines that would foster a more pedestrian friendly community in the Downtown Memphis area. *Fixing* problems was much more of a task than in some areas of Downtown where neighborhoods had adopted policies in the beginning. The Unified Development Code has the ability to designate special areas tailored to that particular area called overlays. These overlay areas have special codes for development. One example of a well thought overlay is the South Main District in Downtown Memphis.

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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?

I do not feel we should ever be satisfied with economic growth, I believe we should continually find new and innovative ways to improve growth. I took advantage of several programs when I located my business in Shelby County. The PILOT program in Downtown was one of those. Attracting, retaining and fostering business brings jobs and prosperity to our community.

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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?

Too often I hear that some of our brightest young people get opportunities elsewhere. We need to focus on retaining our young people and attracting others to our communities. The County Commission has the ability and obligation to provide and support incentives that attract business to our area. We need to be especially mindful of this in our geographic location where businesses find greener pastures across state lines.

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

I am absolutely for incentives that will attract businesses that create jobs and revenue.

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

I feel we do not have a proper plan in place for the transition, but I do feel we have outgrown our two-system government. It has become a hindrance and a problem to our growth.

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

I would want my legacy to be that small business has a big voice.

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