

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

**AN ELECTRONIC VERSION OF THIS FILE CAN BE RECEIVED BY SENDING AN EMAIL
TO peggy@bettermemphis.org**

Name: Keith O. Williams _____

District for which you are running: 9 _____

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 sincere interest in this position is rooted in my passion, desire and commitment to provide quality public service to the citizens of Shelby County. I have previously served as president of the Gardenview and Snowden Schools PTA, Vice President of the Valleywood Homeowners' Association and Officer of the Melrose High National Alumni Association. Currently, I am the president of the Memphis and Shelby County Education Association representing more than 6,500 educators, managing a budget of 1.5 million dollars and the largest local association of professionals in the state of Tennessee. In these various capacities, I have collaborated and negotiated with the School Board, City Council, County Commission, State Legislators and the City and County Mayors

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

Having observed voter apathy, the lack of confidence in government and the threat of losing our democracy propelled me to attempt to restore within citizens of this county hope, confidence and trust in government. The survival

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of our form of government depends on an informed and involved citizenry and to that end I offer my service.

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?**

**Economic development that will enhance employment opportunities and the quality of life for residence throughtout Shelby County
Adequate and equitable funding for all Shelby County Schools
Efficiency in County government relating to service to and access by citizens of Shelby County**

- 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 county debt must be managed through effectiveness and measured outcomes. The tax base should be established to balance required county services and an established percentage to strategically apply to the debt annually. It cannot be done overnight as it was not created over night; however, with effective planning, strategic goals and fidelity of execution, we can overcome the debt and maintain required county services. Education and economic development are key to creating the desire wealth and skilled labor

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force necessary to propel this county into the 22nd century. We need to consider reviewing the tax structure and tax incentives to promote the strongest base for economic growth and to provide needed county services.

3.

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

Adequate funding of public education for all Shelby County students is essential and must be established in concert with the school systems to ensure that all dollars are properly accounted for. Public education will always be funded through property and sales taxes; however, creatively, the county could explore a lottery system or occupational tax, other possible methods of raising needed revenue is more state and federal support. Finally, more accountability from the school systems would be primary as well.

4. Some people believe that urban communities should adopt policies that encourage what is called “smart growth.” Do you believe Shelby County

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should have a general policy about new residential and commercial developments? If so, what should that policy be?

Smart growth is a lofty and great futuristic goal; the problem is how you address the urban issues today in communities where urban areas were not planned and where industrial pollution and mass transportation issues were not addressed. There is merit in planned developments for urban areas, and I would embrace the concept, particularly, as it relates to schools, transportation and industry. The public health, safety and welfare of our citizens demand it. The policy should embrace strategic goals for the counties long term growth. A diverse committee of commissioners, citizens, and experts should convene to study and review smart growth possibilities.

- 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?**

Economic growth, jobs and income are abysmal in Shelby County today; the government has a responsibility to promote the general welfare, to improve economic conditions and employment opportunities for citizens. To provide these economic opportunities the government should offer tax relief and tax and infrastructure incentives. Additionally, partnering with the local school systems and universities to improve the quality of the local labor force should increase opportunities for employment.

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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?**

The absence of aggressive marketing strategies is the greatest obstacle or barrier to economic growth in Shelby County today.

In conjunction with the business community, the chamber of commerce, the convention and visitor's bureau, the public schools and the County Commission should work in concert to create strategies to address these weaknesses. An aggressive marketing campaign should be developed citing the strengths of our community; its geography, topography, potentially viable economy, recreation and entertainment should be highlighted and accentuated. The rich music and cultural heritage of Memphis, the interior waterway of the Mississippi River and the ability to capitalize on the public education systems, k-12 and colleges and universities to provide a highly skilled work force should be recognized.

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

There is a delicate balance between offering incentives to companies considering major new investments or job expansion and its impact on the tax payers of Shelby County. Business incentives are not intended to negatively impact the taxpaying citizens; conversely, the intended consequence is to promote a healthier economy by provided more opportunities for employment within the county. The issue than becomes for whom is the added employment opportunity actual afforded. If Shelby County offers incentives to businesses, there must be reciprocation with significant livable wages and better employment opportunities for Shelby county residents,

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

Unlike the MCS charter surrender, consolidation does offer a plan to define the dialogue and to mutually agree on services and a governmental structure. Duplicity of government services is troubling; however, equity and equality of services can be even more troubling. To mitigate my anxiety on this issue, there should be a merger task force established consisting of all parties (business community, schools, citizens of both the city and county, urban planners, higher education, sociologist, governmental leaders, unions and entities of both the city and the county. This task force should compile data to illustrate the economic, cultural and significant impact of consolidation. After a thorough vetting of the proposal, town hall meetings should be held to present and define the findings and to gage the pulse of the citizens of Memphis and Shelby County. Arming citizens on both sides of the issue with knowledge will equip them to make an informed decision on the consolidation of government.

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

As any public servant would desire, I too wish to leave behind a committed life. My legacy will be a life of service to mankind, and one that has made this place better because I passed this way.

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