

**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](mailto:peggy@bettermemphis.org)**

Name: Mark Billingsley

District for which you are running: Shelby County Commission, District 4

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Section 1: Qualifications and Background (2 questions)

Section 2: Vision and Strategies (4 questions)

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

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<b>1. QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND</b>
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**1. Describe your qualifications for holding the office of Shelby County Commissioner.**

-Shelby County Commissioner, appointed 1-13-14 to present.

-Germantown Alderman, 2008-2012, Germantown Vice Mayor, 2012

I have a history of community and public service that began at age 14. Prior to running for elected office, I was a volunteer Germantown Reserve Police Officer for three years. I have actively advocated at all levels of government at the local, state and national levels and have a good reputation for being fair-minded, fiscally responsible, a team-builder and being able to work in a non-partisan manner for the betterment of our community. I have served in a myriad of leadership positions with area civic and community groups.

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

All of my experiences have lead up to this position. I have worked in earnest to better the community. My record is exemplary to be a good 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?**

**Government Efficiencies & Property Taxes:** I believe we must strive to decrease our dependency on property taxes. I feel there must be a commitment to continue to reduce the County's debt as well. It is going to take political and fiscal fortitude to live within our means and work within our budgetary limits. Families like mine live within our means and I believe government should not be any different.

**Education:** I believe the current state of Shelby County Schools and new Municipal School Districts have created a sense of "us" and "them." I believe we should strive for both County and Municipal schools to succeed. I believe the future of the County's growth will hinged on good education options for all children. I also believe offering early intervention resources from birth to three years old is key to building a foundation for a child's success that has been proven by science and groups like the Urban Child Institute.

**Workforce and Employment:** The poverty level in Memphis approaching almost 30% has a direct impact on our current challenges as well as future. Our inability to address this issue will only continue to exacerbate our problems. Again, we need our best and brightest to help us address poverty in Shelby County. It is not an easy problem to fix but we have to be strategic and begin to make some real investment in helping solve this problem. I believe we can use our citizens to help address this problem in a myriad of ways by getting involved.

**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 we have a good Mayor and Administration at the County that has worked in earnest to pay off our debt. I will work in earnest with the leadership to continue the present path of fiscal responsibility. I will support the S. County Efficiency Review that is currently being implemented. I have been asked to serve relative to the Performance Financial Management Efficiency Study by the Administration. There are a number of priorities from Education to Public Safety that take precedence.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

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

It is the responsibility of Shelby County government to fund public education. I believe there has to be positive and open communication throughout the year that is thoughtful, strategic and fiscally responsible. I believe we have a good Shelby County School Board that has very difficult decisions that have to be made in the coming weeks and months as it relates to efficiencies that most likely will lead to school closures.

**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?**

As Germantown Alderman, we adopted Smart Growth policies and I understand the logic, thus I support Smart Growth. At the same time, we have to aggressively address blight in Memphis and Shelby County. I believe we must continue efforts like our Land Bank that is having a positive impact as well as work with local CDC's to address the blight that has grown like an untreated cancer in our community. We have to stop the continued growth of blight. Empowering our communities to get engaged and using the abilities of the Land Bank is one solution.

**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?**

Efforts to bring more economic development support to West Tennessee are essential. I do not believe we receive the same level of attention or support as those that strive to bring jobs to East Tennessee. I believe we have to bring greater attention to our needs and actively lobby for our fair share of support, resources and consideration. A good example of this would be efforts to bring film productions to West Tennessee. East Tennessee is garnering millions of dollars in productions that choose Nashville over Memphis. These opportunities lead to jobs and future opportunities as well as positive national and international visibility.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

### 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?**

#### **Workforce, Jobs and Poverty**

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There has been a lot of work already done on Workforce Assets. The realities are very challenging. Those underemployed and not employed are significant. Over 40% are also interested in upgrading their skills.

With a problem of this magnitude, I believe it is going to take the involvement of the business community to help us bring resources from the federal, state and local level to have any impact on this great threat to our community and our families. I have personally seen a great number of manufacturing jobs move to Mississippi that has helped our neighbors with good paying jobs, good housing options and nice schools. We have to do a better job retaining and attracting business to Memphis and the Mid-South. My suggestion is major collaboration and teamwork to improve our position with this issue.

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

I understand incentives and appreciate their use as a "tool." With limited resources and a challenged tax base, we have to be mindful of our return on investment. Our citizens learn of failed pilots on the local news and \$9 an hour jobs that sometimes result from pilots and incentives. I believe we should use incentives when necessary and protect ourselves from those that would use our incentives as an opportunity with no ROI. I would like to take a closer look at incentives and what is working across the US especially those with a positive fruition.

SHELBY COUNTY COMMISSIONER CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

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

I do not support consolidation of city and county governments.

I believe, based on public service experience, elected officials must appreciate the thoughts and wants of their constituents. Representing, District 4, Germantown, South Cordova, and the area South that includes Southwind, I do not believe the majority of residents support consolidation of city and county governments. I hope to be their duly elected representative and voice in 2014.

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

Legacy tends to refer to past tense. I would like my present and future work to well represent a public servant and community leader who is making a positive contribution across the entire County and State. I would like to be a bridge-builder in responsible and effective government that well represents the citizens of Shelby County. I also believe the sum of a group is much more effective than any one individual. Thus, I will not be seeking the limelight or recognitions. I will be earning any legacy through my actions versus rhetoric and popular opinions. We have heavy lifting to do in Shelby County and it can only be done with leaders that are more interested in making a real contribution versus promotion. I believe in Shelby County with all my heart and have the experience and passion to make it better.

SHELBY COUNTY COMMISSIONER CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

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