

Philadelphia Crosstown Coalition Questionnaire for Candidates

The Crosstown Coalition, a federation of 19 civic associations listed below, voted to present the enclosed questionnaire to Mayoral and Council candidates who will be on the ballot for the May 19th primary.

DUE DATE: Responses from Mayoral candidates should be delivered no later than Friday March 13 in advance of the March 18 Mayoral Candidates night be hosted by four of our members from communities east of Broad Street. Responses from Council Candidates should be delivered no later than Friday April 3.

INSTRUCTIONS: Electronically insert your answers after each question.

RESPOND TO: Deliver the completed questionnaire to Crosstown Chair Stephen Huntington by email to shuntington@hhflaw.com.

QUESTIONS: Present any inquiries you may have by email or, less preferably, call Mr. Huntington at 215 523 7900 or Communications Chair Ilene Wilder at 215 514 0449

CIRCULATION: Answers (but not the Contact Information) will be promptly posted, first come, first served, on the Crosstown Coalition website: philacrosstown.org and emailed to our 19 member organizations.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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The Office You Are Seeking: City Council At-Large

Members of the Coalition:

Bella Vista Neighbors Association • Center City Residents' Association • Central Roxborough Civic Association • East Falls Community Council • East Passyunk Crossing Civic Association • Fishtown Neighbors Association • Logan Square Neighborhood Association • Northern Liberties Neighbors Association • Overbrook Farms Club • Packer Park Civic Association • Passyunk Square Civic Association • Queen Village Neighbors Association • Society Hill Civic Association • South Broad Street Neighborhood Association • South of South Neighborhood Association • Washington Square West Civic Association • West Powelton/Saunders Park RCO • Woodland Terrace Homeowners Association

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TAX AND FINANCE QUESTIONS

1. TAX ABATEMENT

Philadelphia's ten-year tax abatement eliminates real estate taxes on new construction and improvements (but not the underlying land) for ten years. Supporters argue that the lost tax revenue is more than offset by enhanced business, wage and sales tax collections and note that since the abatement went into effect, development activity has increased dramatically. Opponents argue that the abatement stimulates development for only high income housing, and reduces much needed city real estate tax revenue, of which more than 50% goes to schools.

Should the ten year realty tax abatement continue as is? No

Should it be modified or abolished? Yes

If you favor modification, what modifications should be made?

I support a strategic abatement policy, not a blanket one, targeted toward needy communities where development would not otherwise occur. I believe the current policy is far too expansive and has taken away important resources which could and should be going toward schools. I do think that targeted abatements can assist with making development more appealing in neighborhoods and communities which have long awaited such opportunities. I am open to other modifications, and believe in general that we must be much more engaged in reviewing our various abatements and subsidies to ensure they are truly delivering on their intended purpose and creating a public benefit.

2. REAL ESTATE TAXATION

In 2013, for the first time in over two decades, the City reassessed all 579,000 parcels within the City limits. Tens of thousands of residential

property owners were shocked to receive much higher property tax assessments

How frequently should reassessments occur?

Assessments should occur regularly, and as frequently as is feasible given available resources. I would defer to best practices regarding whether that should occur annually, biannually, etc., but certainly we should never again have a situation where it takes decades to reassess properties citywide. At the same time, I am committed to exercising oversight and helping to ensure that any remaining questions or issues related to the quality of our appraisals is publicly examined and resolved. For example, it is important that we reconsider how we are valuing vacant land, to ensure that the tax burden is being fairly and accurately distributed among taxpayers.

3. WAGE TAX

Philadelphia receives 66% of its tax revenue from wages and business receipts; in contrast, in New York City and Washington DC, 34% and 35% of tax revenues are from wages and business receipts. In those two cities, proceeds from real estate taxes are much larger (41% and 36%, respectively) than in Philadelphia, where this value is 17%. Critics contend that Philadelphia's reliance on wage/business taxes drives workers and businesses out of the City because it is easier to relocate people than it is to relocate offices and factories.

Should Philadelphia shift more of its revenue sourcing from wage and business taxes to real estate taxes?

If you believe we should shift away from wage and business taxes to real estate taxes, how would you propose to do this?

If you do not believe that such a shift should occur, why not?

It is essential that we are both careful and smart about any major changes to our tax structure.

There have been some proposals to make Philadelphia's business taxes better targeted and more progressive, through the creative use of exemptions that most significantly benefit small and local businesses. My core commitment is to continue to explore ways to make our business taxation more progressive, and

specifically to figure out how to ensure that larger, profitable businesses pay their fair share while also making Philadelphia sustainable for entrepreneurship and business development

I agree with the theoretical proposition that we should focus our business taxation on things that will not leave, which is usually thought about as shifting more tax to land but which could also encompass out-of-town big businesses that sell their goods here, for whom small increases in business taxes will not be overly burdensome. This could potentially be accomplished within uniformity clause limits by adjusting the balance between the gross receipts and net income portions of our taxes and I support getting impartial expert analysis of this proposal. If the analysis supports the projected benefits of this approach, I would introduce or support legislation to execute this shift, and to also reduce the tax burden on smaller businesses by making the tax increasingly progressive.

Similarly I believe our wage tax structure should prioritize any reductions toward those least able to pay for it. But I will also note my caution that a large scale shift away from the wage tax, which collects 1.3 billion dollars per year, large chunks of it from suburban residents, would shift a much, much larger tax burden on taxpayers living within the City. I think it is very fair for suburban commuters to share some burden for a city they greatly benefit from, and am not willing to quadruple—or more— Philadelphia real estate taxes in order to eliminate the wage tax.

At heart, my priority is to improve the overall wealth and health of the city as a whole. Taxation is just one aspect. The key to improving our business climate starts with our schools and our city services, rather than simply through the reduction of taxes. In addition to schools, this includes transit and “complete streets,” world-class parks and recreation facilities, and transparent and responsive government. That is what will keep middle class families here, what will provide businesses with a vibrant, skilled work force, and what will keep our city growing as a place where people want to live, work, raise their families and contribute to the vibrant civic, economic and social life that makes our city great. This is the message I have heard resoundingly when I speak with individual business owners, start-up teams, long-time residents, and newer employees recruited to our city.

4. DELINQUENT TAXES

The City currently has over \$1 billion in delinquent taxes. Approximately half are delinquent property taxes and half are delinquent wage, business income, and related business taxes. Each year, the deficit grows, a trend which suggests that the City lacks the political will or competence (or both) to collect taxes. One tax collection strategy is to remove the collection task from

the City and sell tax liens to private investors so that the private sector would set about collecting these debts. Proponents observe that because the \$1 billion delinquency shows that the City is incapable or unwilling to collect delinquent taxes, tax collections should be transferred to the private sector. Critics worry that private concerns would engage in improper collection tactics or fail to fairly treat tax delinquents who are down on their luck.

Should the City sell tax liens to private investors?

If not, what steps would you take to ensure that the delinquency is addressed?

Selling our tax liens for pennies on the dollar, at least in a large-scale way, is an idea that sounds wonderful from 40,000 feet, but that on closer inspection comes with great costs. Among other things, mass lien sales will essentially end the power of the Land Bank to do good before it ever gets started. While the prevalence of so many uncollected liens is a problem, the Land Bank presents us an efficient way to use those delinquencies to take properties into City inventory, clear the debt, and assemble parcels for development, give them to communities for gardens and open spaces, etc. When we sell the liens, we lose that control. Moreover, if needed, we can (and the City already does) use third parties to collect tax delinquencies without actually selling liens. Tax lien sales are not a panacea, as we saw the last time this was done in Philadelphia in the 90s; a significant number of those sold liens are still sitting out there uncollected, burdening properties, and obstructing redevelopment – only now the City has lost the ability to clear that debt. For this reason and others, I do not think selling liens is a smart decision, and I would not support it.

The issue of selling liens, however, should not be equated with addressing delinquency itself. Philadelphia is a city with great needs. We cannot afford to fail to collect the taxes owed, both because it deprives us of revenue and because it puts an ever greater burden on those that are paying, which then incentivizes those homeowners to leave. Simply put, everyone needs to pay their fair share for the City to function. Thus, we must do significant outreach in every language needed to let delinquent homeowners know about city payment plans, and get them into paying status.

The key to ensuring that delinquency is addressed is to 1) set realistic goals for reducing delinquency; 2) provide significant transparency around actual delinquency rates, types of individuals and situations impacted, challenges to collection and review innovative new measures; 4) aggressive outreach to

homeowners to get everyone in paying status; and 4) serious attention and careful public review of the Revenue Department to ensure they are meeting benchmarks and achieving goals. This is work I have advocated for with the City Revenue Department in the past, and the City's recent efforts have produced results. We must continue to push for improvements, and to eliminate more and more delinquency.

5. PGW SALE

Advocates of the recent failed sale of the Philadelphia Gas Works (PGW) favored the sale because the City could use the proceeds, about \$400 million, to reduce the \$5 billion underfunding of the City's pensions. They further contended that the City had no business running a gas company, that City ownership leaves open the door for patronage positions at PGW, that City ownership limited the business opportunities of the operation, and that under public ownership, it will take nearly 90 years to replace the City's ancient and increasingly unsafe gas mains. Opponents asserted that a sale would eliminate PGW's annual \$18 million contribution to the City's general fund. Opponents were also concerned that even though a privately operated PGW, like PECO, would be regulated by the Public Utility Commission, a private operator would be more likely to raise rates and be less responsive to the needs of low income residents than a City owned utility. Critics also contended that the private operator produced no credible plan for upgrading infrastructure that would not have entailed substantial long-term rate increases. Both sides presented reports substantiating their positions. Despite these divergent views, City Council decided not to hold public hearings on the proposal, let alone conduct a ye or nay vote.

Do you believe that City Council should have conducted public hearings on the PGW controversy? Please explain your answer. What is your vision for the future of PGW?

Yes, City Council should have absolutely conducted hearings. That said, I am not at all convinced that selling PGW was a good idea. Thus, my vision for PGW is simple, until I can be convinced otherwise: an efficient, well-working, public utility.

Fifteen years ago, an innovative power company from Texas came to Philadelphia to buy PECO. That company's innovations, we were told, would ensure good rates for consumers, and any large scale worries we had would be ameliorated by the fact that the PUC would still set rates. It was a win, win. That company—Enron—did not complete the sale. A few years later, it

took down the entire California economy, and sent countless lives into economic ruin.

Would UIL have been the same? Probably not. However, given that that UIL has already—within mere months—been acquired by yet another multi-national conglomerate, the fears that we could be selling our gas company to the whims of Wall Street seem ever more prescient. There is a growing realization among even many skeptics that public utilities staying public—but with strong civil governance structures—are the best way for Cities to provide these crucial services. We might complain about our utilities, but, ask residents of South Jersey how they feel about privatized water, and you will hear much louder complaints (and often see much larger annual rate hikes). Thus, again, unless I can be convinced otherwise, I do not believe selling PGW is a smart move for our City.

6. PENSIONS

The City spends 18% of its budget – about \$660 million (in 2012) – on pensions. Even so, the City’s pension obligations are currently underfunded by approximately \$5 billion, more than the \$4 billion the City expects to take in during the next fiscal year. Three questions:

Do you believe that the City can “grow” its way out of this deficit- i.e. that prosperity in the City, as distinguished from tax hikes, will produce higher realty and business tax revenues so that the additional funds can be used to pay down the deficit OR that the City can somehow change its ways and pay down the deficit by better practices?

If you do not believe that “growth” alone will suffice to address this issue, , which do you favor: raising taxes, cutting spending or selling assets? Depending on your answer, specifically identify the taxes to be raised, the names of the programs that should be cut (please no generalities like eliminating “waste and abuse”), or the assets to be sold.

To gradually improve the pension plan’s funding status, do you favor continuing the defined benefit plan for existing employees while instituting a defined contribution plan for more recently hired employees?

Pensions are both a compact with our retirees and an economic driver in many neighborhoods that pays for itself many times over. We are in our unfortunate state today because a) our city work force has shrunk so much over the past thirty

years lessening the employees paying in, and b) because of poor decisions made by previous administrations.

I don't think it is reasonable to try to fix it in one or two years. And I don't think it is reasonable to assume growth will take care of our problem—although it will help, as will a continued, smaller work force and small number of workers turning into retirees. The deficit is a years-long hole that we have dug and it will be a years-long effort to dig our way out.

Councilman Clarke proposed dedicating a portion of the city sales tax to pensions. As we get school finances stabilized over the next couple of years, that is worthy of study. Governor Wolf has also put forward important proposals at the state level to achieve cost savings through use of passively-managed index funds. These should be reviewed within a local context as well.

And within the City, we must look at all sorts of problematic spending. But your premise of the question is right on: there is not some magical pot of a billion dollars in spending for us to find. (For example, as you know, we would save some money eliminating the sheriff's office. But in reality, most of those employees will still do the same job, under a different department.)

In terms of new employees and defined contribution plans, I think that is a little bit of a red herring, which sounds tough, but will not achieve significant savings for many, many years. I do not support it.

DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS

7. CHANGING NEIGHBORHOODS

Some Philadelphia neighborhoods are changing, with better-off people moving into areas historically occupied by less well-off residents. This trend increases the city's tax base (and thus its ability to address the challenges many of its residents face) and often improves the physical characteristics of a neighborhood, but it can also bring unsettling changes, not only through increasing property taxes but also via alterations in the makeup of affected communities.

Other than providing real estate tax relief to long-time residents whose assessments have increased due to rising values in the neighborhood, do you believe that government should intervene regarding these neighborhood changes?

If so, list the disruptions you would target and the remedies you would suggest.

I certainly support tax relief. I think that there are two realities with gentrification. First, there is plenty of housing stock to go around in Philadelphia. Second, impoverished communities who feel like they have long gotten the short end of the stick understandably feel uncomfortable with people moving into communities who often of are a different race or a different socio-economic background.

City government can only do so much. But by heavily supporting and encouraging the shared use of public spaces and institutions, be they neighborhood schools or rec centers, we can all grow together, and raise our children together. For generations, public institutions have bound together generations of disparate peoples in cities across America. I also believe that we should do more to ensure truly equitable distribution of services across both wealthy and poor neighborhoods, including using data and mapping in our City budgeting process. I believe that gentrification would be less of a flashpoint if it did not appear to many that only certain neighborhoods benefit from attention and investment.

8. ZONING RELIEF THROUGH COUNCIL

In 2012, after years of effort, the City passed a comprehensive revision of its zoning code. Many developers with projects which do not conform to the new zoning code have sought City Council ordinances to revise the zoning of their parcels, without going through the Zoning Board of Adjustment for a variance. Critics claim that zoning by council ordinance favors those with Council connections and/or big-ticket projects. Proponents argue that stakeholder input can be received in Council and that the Council procedure will encourage development because legal challenges to council ordinances are less likely than appeals from Zoning Board decisions.

Would you vote for (or sign) ordinances enabling developments contrary to the zoning code and which have not received a variance from the Zoning Board of Adjustment? If so, under what circumstances would you vote for (or sign) such ordinances?

Zoning reform was an immense accomplishment, and protecting it is essential if we are to continue to improve our city's development climate and economic growth. Similarly, under Mayor Nutter's administration and the new zoning code, we have seen a long-overdue elevation of the role of the Planning Department. I would certainly use my position as a Council member to support and advance the goals of the zoning reform process, and stand up for the integrity of the new zoning code. However, I also realize that legislation as complex as the new zoning code will not remain completely

static over time. I would be open to evolution of the code as government and stakeholders discover aspects that may not be working how we envisioned, and which need to be adjusted. I would take my strongest guidance in this matter from the Planning Department, and experts within the administration.

9. CITY-OWNED VACANT PROPERTIES

The City owns some 10,000 vacant properties. These properties cost \$21 million per year to maintain. Selling these properties requires City Council approval under the newly enacted Land Bank Ordinance. Sales must also be reviewed by the 14-member vacant property review committee, composed of City officials. Some worry that these procedures serve to delay the sale of these properties and open the process to political bartering, favoritism, and waste. Others say that City Council and the Project Review Committee will appropriately protect the public interest and increase community input in redevelopment.

Will you vote to amend the ordinance by eliminating the Council ordinance provision? Explain your response.

I would advocate for continuing to streamline the Land Bank's disposition process. It is worth understanding that the Land Bank could not have happened without some compromise, and I believe it is a crucial tool to help us finally consolidate public inventory in one place and also to repurpose abandoned, tax-delinquent properties. I am hopeful that as the Land Bank starts running, and City Council members and other stakeholders come to trust in its operations, we can revisit the issue of City Council and the Review Committee's role.

GOVERNMENT & ADMINISTRATION

10. ETHICS: CREATING A PERMANENT INSPECTOR GENERAL

The current City Inspector General, Amy Kurland, holds office pursuant to an Executive Order originally issued in 1984 which could be rescinded at any time by any mayor.

Are you willing to support for Bill 130001 calling for a ballot referendum to amend the City Charter to establish an independent Inspector General funded by taxpayer dollars who would have oversight over every city department?

If elected Mayor, would you leave the current Executive Order in place and promptly fill the Inspector General's position?

I strongly support making the Inspector General position permanent.

I also support fixing a variety of loopholes in our city's ethics and campaign finance laws. For example, I would support changing donation limits to election cycles rather than calendar years, and I believe that we should institute a comprehensive disclosure law, so that third-party groups that seek to influence elections are required to disclose their donors.

11. UNFAIR ELECTORAL DISTRICTING

"Gerrymandering" is drawing electoral districts to serve the interests of politicians or parties. A 2010 survey ranked two of Philadelphia City Council districts (5 and 7) among the top ten gerrymandered districts nationwide, with two others (1 and 9) also highly ranked on the gerrymandering scale.

Would you vote to amend the City Charter in 2015 so that the next redistricting in 2020 will be conducted by an independent, non-partisan commission?

Absolutely. The lines of the Seventh District in particular—while now significantly better since the most recent redistricting—was a longtime civic punchline. This should not be a partisan issue.

12. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Philadelphia elects three "City Commissioners" whose only duty is to administer elections. They serve four years regardless of their performance. In most cities, the election process is not run by three people, but by one, who is appointed by the mayor and can be removed for poor performance. Proponents say that the current system in Philadelphia empowers voters who can reject ineffectual or dishonest Commissioners. Detractors assert that Philadelphia voters are largely unaware of the duties of the three City Commissioners whose job title does not describe their job function so that the ballot results do not reflect voter's assessments of on the job performance.

Would you vote to amend the City Charter, eliminating the City Commissioners and adding the position of an election administrator that reports to the Mayor?

I will answer 12 and 13 together, since I think they are so interconnected. My answer to both is yes. First, I have done real work to go after some of the worst patronage abuses in the city, including the PPA (Republican-based) and the BRT

(Democratic-based). In 2008, for example, under Parents United, I worked to successfully remove patronage workers from the Bureau of Revision of Taxes from the School District payroll and put them back on the City payroll where they belonged. That effort was part of a broader effort to reform the BRT and led to the creation of the City-run Office of Property Assessment.

The issue might be different if these offices functioned well. They do not, and there is no realistic way that there can be an informed race about these offices. Simply put, their function should be professional and non-partisan. (They are relics from an era when we used to elect just about everything, including City coroner).

Again, this all has real impacts on our city, well beyond the small number of jobs that would actually be saved. Thus, when dealing with the burden of vacant land and abandoned properties, for example, we have to consider what it means when land sales lag at the Sheriff's office. Every dollar we don't collect because the office is too slow to get vacant land back into productive use, is a dollar we cannot spend on our schools or other desperately needed city services.

13. SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Per the City Charter, the Sheriff's office is an elective position charged with responsibility for the sale of tax delinquent properties, courtroom security, and transport of inmates. Like the Clerk of Quarter Sessions, another elected office which was recently eliminated by a Charter revision, the Clerk of Quarter Sessions Court has been unable to account for the funds which it receives and its foreclosure procedures have been seen as partially responsible for the half billion dollars of property tax delinquencies. Critics of the Sheriff's office maintain that its functions should be administered by administration appointees who can be hired and fired based upon their competence. Defenders of the Office assert that Philadelphia's voters, not the Mayor, should choose who should conduct sheriff's sales, and arrange for courtroom security and inmate transport.

Would you vote to abolish the Sherriff's office, transferring to other City agencies its functions (Sheriff's sales, courtroom security and inmate transfer)?

See above.

14. ROLE OF NEIGHBORHOODS IN DEVELOPMENT & QUALITY OF LIFE

Philadelphia is called the city of neighborhoods, but many of our basic planning, resource, and development decisions are made with little or no effective input of neighborhoods--vital stakeholders in the city's future. These include overall development patterns, placement and design of special events, major construction, and placement and operation of key public facilities—each of which can have major impacts on adjacent communities. Some measures have been made, such as the design review process is zoning code and open public involvement. But these remain advisory, and most localized decisions and issues are still the purview of district Councilpeople rather than the administration.

What would you do to give neighborhoods more meaningful roles in decision-making and more effective engagement as partners in the city's goals and mission?

Much of my work has to been to empower communities, to grow leaders, and to help the voiceless stand up for what is right. When Asian-American students were the targets of race-based violence in South Philadelphia High School, I helped those students stand up and demand a safe school. Similarly, when the City has tried to use Chinatown as a development dumping ground for stadiums and casinos, potentially ruining a unique residential and commercial neighborhood, I organized the community to say no. I want to use my office to bring those struggles, and those communities, into City Hall. I am committed to help ensure that both opportunity and access to public resources are distributed equitably, and according to community priorities.

Achieving true democracy and community participation is not easy, fast, or simple, but we can make significant strides if we are committed. We need to continue and expand open data gains made under the last administration, and advance ways to make that data more useable and accessible to all communities. We should consider the participatory budgeting model, successfully used for some public decision-making in a growing number of jurisdictions. We must actually achieve our language access obligations, so that every Philadelphian has access to their city government and the services they need. I welcome your additional suggestions for how we can achieve these goals.

15. **SCHOOLS**

Per the Mayor's Tale of the Tape, In fiscal year 2013-2014, Philadelphia contributed \$1,216,319,000 to fund the School District, a contribution which accounted for 42.3% of the School District's revenues, a percentage smaller than Chicago (50.3%), Dallas (57.7%) and Boston (67.2%) but larger than Memphis (38.4%), Baltimore (20.7%) and Detroit (20.4%).

What is the dollar amount of the contribution that you believe the City should make in fiscal year 2016 – 2017, your first year in office, and how you would finance it. Explain your conclusion

Do you believe that any strings/conditions should be attached to the City's contributions to the School District budget and, if so, what are they?

We need a funding formula from the state that prioritizes both equity and adequacy from the state, and we need improved targeted funding at the federal level. I will use my office to continue to marshal a groundswell of support for that. However, most of my work has always concentrated on local obligations within city government to 1) improve city funding of schools; 2) improve and strengthen accountability for those funds; and 3) build a broader public will around a culture of investment toward education in our city. This is achievable in the following ways:

1. A shift in the proportional distribution of property taxes from a 55 percent share to schools to (at a minimum) the 2007 norm of 60 percent to schools. Property taxes are still the bread and butter of school district funding and captures growing wealth in the city. Under Parents United for Public Education, I fought to ensure that a minimum of 60% share would go toward city schools. A five percent shift from 55% to 60% would result in over \$75 million for Philadelphia schools this year alone and would not result in additional tax burdens on homeowners. More importantly, as the city continues to grow and expand, improving the share of funding toward city schools ensures that expanded wealth results in a growing source of revenue for our schools.
2. Support a strategic approach to real estate abatements, rather than a blanket policy around them.
3. Review and advocate for improved collection of the remainder of city taxes that support the schools. **Use & Occupancy:** In 2013 I strongly advocated for proposed legislation that would provide relief for small businesses and strengthen contributions from larger businesses, many of which received

significant tax breaks under AVI (estimated revenue=\$50 million+). We need a more progressive approach to improving the U&O tax which is the second largest source of local School District revenue. **School Income Tax:** This tax has never been closely reviewed and as a result is effectively a voluntary tax. I would conduct a comparative analysis and review of the tax and encourage a broad public campaign to improve collections. **Liquor by the Drink:** This is another tax with a complicated collection history – but one I would review for fairness and effectiveness.

4. Encourage our non-profit giants to revive the City's once thriving Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program. (Total: \$15-20 million)
5. Ensure that profits from future sales of taxicab medallions go toward the Parking Authority's City/School District profit-sharing arrangement. The PPA seeks to allocate tens of millions of dollars for its own use in a newly created fund not subject to the profit-sharing arrangement. (Total: initially estimated at \$22 million, plus more in future years, however medallion sales have been weaker than expected.) While I understand that the PPA is technically a state agency, City officials have been influential in the PPA's operations and board oversight and were a key factor in ensuring our successful 2007 campaign to require the PPA to meet its profit-sharing obligations.

In terms of attaching strings, one of the key responsibilities for City Council is exercising oversight for the School District's budget, which, even after debilitating cuts, is the rather significant sum of \$2.6 billion. Many core functions of the District have been cut to the bone and beyond, but we must be smart about the many essential spending decisions that remain. I have fought for and won open data and access to budget documents (including Parents United's victory in ensuring that individual school budgets are posted along with the overall District budget), and have supported efforts at participatory community-based budgeting. I have extensive experience and familiarity with the School District's budget, which is a complex document, and have been a leader in closely scrutinizing it and providing essential public accountability for years including to City Council. I will redouble those efforts to if elected.

We also must do more to integrate the School District into City government. We are spending significant sums of money seeking funds for schools for services that could be streamlined with city services, including areas like transportation, DHS and victim-witness services. As a City Councilperson, I would focus on integrated approaches to City-District services that strengthen and improve coordinated outreach to vulnerable communities.

LIFESTYLE

16. HOUSING FIRST

Philadelphia has one of the lowest levels of street homelessness of any major American city – 1 in 5,000 Philadelphians lives on the streets in comparison to 1 in 2,700 Bostonians, 1 in 1,800 Chicagoans, 1 in 300 San Franciscans or 1 in 100 Los Angelinos. [Source: Project Home, Saving Money, Saving Lives, 2009, at p. 4] Nevertheless, anyone who has spent time in our public spaces recognizes that there is a significant street population, typically suffering from mental illness or substance addiction, many of whom are likely not homeless. The City has implemented “housing first” programs that place individuals in supportive, permanent housing without regard to continued substance use and/or untreated mental health conditions and spends 108 million per year on homeless services.

If housing is readily available for homeless people, should they be permitted to live in public spaces?

Do you favor sidewalk ordinances to regulate aggressive panhandling and other antisocial behavior?

Respectfully, except for the very mentally ill, I do not believe that people choose sleeping on the streets over safe, decent housing. We may not have technical street homelessness to rival L.A. or San Francisco—thank goodness—but we also have shelters that are often over-crowded, feel unsafe, or do not accommodate families and children. Each safe housing bed we increase is one less person who might head to the street – this is why the “Housing First” model is so important, and why we must do more to actually ensure safe housing is available for everyone who needs it. In terms of the ill, we need to redouble efforts at real mental health and drug treatment.

I don’t believe, within the bounds of the First Amendment, that you can regulate someone asking for a dollar or a SEPTA token. I do think, however, that all Philadelphians should be free of street harassment, whether that comes from a homeless person, a construction worker, or a Center City lawyer. I have experienced all three types, and enjoyed none of it.