

Introductory Questions

1. What office are you seeking, and why did you decide to run for that office? If (re) elected, what are your priority areas of focus?

I am seeking re-election as the Ward 7 Councilmember. I am a lifelong Washingtonian. Growing up we had very little, but my parents worked hard and taught me to do the same. Education and community were values that underpinned my upbringing. My entire career has been in service to others.

When I launched my campaign four years ago, I said, “The hope and promise of Ward 7 cannot slip away.” By working together, we have reinvigorated communities. Projects that were stalled are succeeding now. Progress is no longer something we wait for, it is something we are seeing. Residents of Ward 7 and people across the District deserve more and that is why I am seeking reelection. I have dedicated my entire career to serving and uplifting District residents; especially those with the greatest needs. For every person who we've helped, for every achievement we've celebrated, there are countless others that require our commitment. Our work is not finished.

I am hugely focused on early childhood education, especially Birth to Three services to support PreKindergarten; bringing more grocery stores to Ward 7 and the East End of the city; building a true healthcare system, and; increasing violence interruption services to reduce crime.

Budget

2. Do you consider the District's total current budget to be too large, too small, or about right? Please explain.

The District's budget has increased remarkably over the past decade. And I am delighted to have played an instrumental role in achieving that, especially as a former Mayor. More money can improve the lives of District residents, provided that it is prioritized, invested and spent wisely. As the Councilmember representing Ward 7 where health, education, jobs, housing, economic development, opportunity and other disparities and inequities have not been fully addressed, the budget as experienced by many of my constituents feels too small. I would be remiss, however, if I did not comment on the effect of the current public health emergency on the District's financial well-being.



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The good news is that the District is in a better place than many other jurisdictions, and better than what it could be facing. This is not due to happenstance. That foresight and fiscal discipline have positioned the District to financially withstand harsh storms. The challenging news is that the District is facing an unprecedented public health emergency, the full fiscal effect of which is still being assessed and a new proposed budget is being developed in face of the COVID 19 pandemic we are experiencing.

3. With unemployment, homelessness, and general economic distress at high levels, do you envision increasing safety net spending in future budgets? If so, which areas would you seek to expand?

Yes, contingent upon what we face with mounting the cost of COVID 19.

Times of crisis often reveal weaknesses while exacerbating existing inequities. They also reveal the need and benefit of having a safety net.

Our city is vibrant and growing, but too many residents are still living without jobs, the security of a stable home, or the certainty of a warm meal. Though there has been improvement, not enough of the District's economic development is reaching people with the greatest need. A caring economy continues to focus on uplifting our neighbors until everyone benefits from ongoing prosperity. And creates access to the amenities people deserve.

4. With the COVID-19 outbreak causing an economic downturn and stress on state and local budgets, would you support raising taxes to maintain current spending levels? If so, how should new revenue sources be targeted?

When I took the helm as Mayor, the District was reeling from overspending and the great recession, in dire need of strategic financial planning to get us out of where we were and to where we needed to be. We worked diligently with the Chief Financial Officer to accomplish just that. We made the difficult decision to raise taxes in order to stabilize the city's finances, which we did, and also managed to implement many forward-thinking initiatives such as universal PreK, school modernization of our schools, implementing early childhood education improvements and economic development. Due to the coronavirus, the District finds itself again in need of strategic financial planning, and again I will work with the executive, the CFO and my Council colleagues to accomplish just that.



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Transportation, Housing and Infrastructure

5. More than a third of DC residents do not own cars and automobile traffic significantly contributes to climate change. If elected, how will you work to improve public transportation in the District?

With a rapidly growing population, it is imperative that we continue to work toward getting more people out of automobiles, a longtime focus of mine. During my Mayoral administration, the District's Department of Transportation led Move DC, a bold, but implementation-focused long-range transportation plan. The plan identified a future high capacity transit network. With the District's increasing population, it is important that we have alternative transportation methods, especially those that encourage and support transportation by means other than a personal vehicle.

MoveDC, the District's strategic transportation plan, calls for a vast expansion of bike trails and protected bike lanes, which are proven to reduce motorist speeding, decrease crashes and conflicts, cut air pollution, and make bicycling, walking, and scooter driving easier for residents of all ages and abilities. MoveDC also foreshadows an effective policy to reduce traffic delays, air pollution, carbon emissions and deadly road crashes. Also supports decongestion pricing, whereby drivers would pay for the privilege to drive into the most congested parts of downtown DC.

Not only will decongestion pricing reduce gridlock on our streets and cut down on carbon emissions helping to make the District a more sustainable and healthier city, it can also raise needed funds for Metro upgrades and improvements to our transit systems. In advancing new policies like this, we also need to look through the lens of equity and the impact such policies will have on our more financially and employment vulnerable populations. If such legislation is put forward, there must be considerations for people who are disabled, those making below a certain income range and people already living in the decongestion pricing areas.

6. Other global cities are working to increase nearby access to amenities for all residents. For example, Paris recently announced a plan to become a "15-minute city" with grocery stores and other destinations located within a short walk of every home. What will you do to eliminate food deserts and improve local options throughout the District?



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Historically, the most disadvantaged and neglected part of the District has been the East End of the city. It deserves the kind of intensive economic, educational infrastructure, and human-services investment that other parts of the District have seen in recent years. Since my return to office, I have introduced three economic development bills that are focused on bringing high quality, healthy food choices, retail and sit-down restaurants to Ward 7. The Council has passed all three bills.

One bill enhances tax incentives at nine targeted sites in Wards 7 and 8, (six of which are in Ward 7) while requiring 50% of the eligible businesses' full-time employees to be District residents. The second bill lowers the commercial real property tax on the East End. The third bill established the East End Grocery and Retail Construction Incentive program, whereby the District would pay for the bricks-and-mortar construction of new full-service grocery stores, retail shopping, and sit-down restaurant businesses at the targeted sites in the Ward.

Currently, for over 70,000 Ward 7 residents, there are only two full-service grocery stores. Additionally, more than three-quarters of the District's food deserts are on the East End of the city, including Ward 7. To help end this food injustice, I introduced Bill 22-207, which is now law, called the "East End Grocery Incentive Act of 2018. This legislation created the East End Grocery and Retail Incentive Program within the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED) to eliminate food deserts in Wards 7 and 8. The legislation also sought to fund nine large shovel-ready parcel sites in Wards 7 and 8 for development that would include full-service grocery stores, co-anchor retail, and a sit-down restaurant. Six of the nine sites are in Ward 7. The law states that the Grocery Incentive Act program "shall be funded "from the District surpluses after the District reached 60 days cash-on-hand, which it recently did, as verified in the District's Comprehensive Financial Audit (CAFR). This means up to \$161.8 million can now be appropriated to end food deserts in Wards 7 and 8 through the construction of full-service grocery stores. While these dollars have now been generated, we must be mindful of the demands that will be imposed by the COVID 19 challenges ahead.

7. As of 2019, there were 6,500 people in the District experiencing homelessness and the economic impact of COVID-19 will place a strain on thousands more. How do you plan on decreasing homelessness in a sustainable way?

I believe the District needs to make strategic decisions in affordable housing that ensures the investments we are making with taxpayer resources are spent wisely to target those who most need our help, particularly seniors and vulnerable populations. The District



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should also increase funding for the emergency rental assistance program (ERAP) to help families avoid homelessness. By providing temporary assistance in times of need, the program is a lifeline to many vulnerable families. Every year, this program spends its entire budget, and it could benefit from additional funds. ERAP enables the District to provide short-term assistance to keep a person or family from falling into homelessness. With far too many families living paycheck-to-paycheck, even a two-week gap in employment can put a family at risk of not being able to pay the monthly rent. ERAP fills those small gaps that could otherwise force a self-sufficient family or individual into the District's shelter system.

8. If (re) elected, what will you do to create and protect affordable housing for both home-buyers and renters?

The lack of affordable housing continues to be a growing concern for the District. The attempt to find long term solutions to this concern is no easy task. However, there are some tools available to the District and its residents to help increase the supply of affordable housing through current legislation and policies. For instance, the District's Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act can be an important tool for preserving affordable housing in the District. According to the Department of Housing and Community Development, since 2016 D.C. tenants have exercised their rights as part of two dozen deals to preserve affordable housing. In addition, investing in Federally established Opportunity Zones can provide preferential tax treatment to those that invest in geographic areas which have been identified as low-income census tracts.

As Mayor, in FY 2014, we began an annual investment of \$100 million for affordable housing, with \$287 million invested in the second year. Also, as Mayor, I introduced legislation to require that after the District reached 60 days cash-on-hand in its fund balance, 50% of additional surpluses would be dedicated annually to the Housing Production Trust Fund. Because of to this legislation, the Housing Production Trust Fund will receive an additional \$161.8 million this year based on the FY 1999 city audit pre COVID 19.

As a Councilmember, I will continue to ensure a more transparent budget process, help to establish long-and short-term objectives and priorities around affordable housing needs, oversee performance of key housing departments and agencies, programs and policies and worked to ensure the effectiveness of these programs.



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9. Revitalization in DC has created an increase in commercial and residential development. Though this revitalization is beneficial to the District, certain areas are not experiencing it at the same rate as other neighborhoods. What are your plans to ensure that all of DC benefits from periods of economic growth?

I represent an area that has not benefitted as much from the increase in commercial and residential development. When I solicited the input of the Ward 7 community, this was one of their top priorities, and it continues to be. As a result, I employed a series of strategies to address commercial and residential development needs. For example, I introduced a suite of bills designed to directly address barriers that have hindered needed, desired and deserved grocery stores, sit-down restaurants and other amenities from locating in Ward 7 and on the East End of the city in general. The Council has passed those bills, but not all have been fully funded, although we have seen evidence of tangible success in Ward 7. My plan is not only to continue my pursuit of funding for these important initiatives, but to also continue listening to and working in partnership with the Ward 7 community to implement other approaches to achieve our shared goals to the benefit of long-time residents as well as recent and future residents.

10. Which recently revitalized DC neighborhood would you suggest as the best model for the city as a whole, and why?

The District still has an opportunity to show what is the best model for revitalization. One thing we have learned is that every neighborhood is different. The unique character of each neighborhood is what keeps long-time residents there and also attracts new neighbors. Through my East End economic development and amenity legislation and other efforts, I have been trying to bring economic development to neighborhoods in Ward 7 in a way that does not mean concurrent displacement and drastic change in demographics, but benefits long-time residents as well as new neighbors. In that sense, I think the best model is yet to be achieved.

Education

11. Do you think reform in the DC public schools is headed in the right direction? Explain your answer.



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Education reform is working in the District, as enrollment continues to increase in both our traditional DCPS and public charter schools. We must stay the course and continue to support our education leadership while encouraging increased coordination and shared planning between DCPS and the charter sector.

As an elected city leader, I supported and still support the governance changes made through the Public Education Reform Amendment Act (PERAA). The law required PERAA to be independently evaluated, and the National Research Council performed an evaluation that provided recommendations. I agree with the wisdom that leads us to examine our policies and structures for ways to improve them. With PERAA, I believe there are improvements that can be made with how the law has been implemented. One of the more notable examples is the IMPACT evaluation system. We have seen how, as an instrument of evaluation, it has changed in response to feedback and in pursuit of a better and fairer evaluation of our education professionals. I am committed to working with my Council colleagues as well as our public school students, families and stakeholders to see how we can improve education outcomes with and under PERAA.

12. How do you suggest that we repurpose school properties that have been closed over the past few years?

I have spoken with charter schools about their desire to potentially locate in Ward 7, and I am aware of the facility acquisition challenges that charter schools face. The District must faithfully adhere to the requirements of the Landrieu Act. As Mayor, I turned over more schools to charters than any other mayor. I was delighted to turn over buildings to charters which had demonstrated the capacity to manage them and make the investments to convert them to first class facilities. I have seen some very creative financing approaches like use of New Market Tax Credits and Industrial Revenue Bonds to generate innovative ways to upgrade and save money for the school. I also believe that good policies must also consider the input of affected communities and be guided by strategic planning.

13. How will you ensure equitable Special Education allocations across the city?

I have spent a substantial portion of my career serving children with special needs. The District should focus on developing curricula that are responsive to the child's Individual Education Plan, recognizing that an enormous portion of success lies in understanding the child's needs while creating a supportive learning environment where the child can enjoy social acceptance and is not subjected to judgmental experiences. The IEP should be the framework for determining effectiveness and responsiveness. Through oversight, the



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Council can determine the degree to which IEPs are used as an instructional guide in measuring the extent to which a healthy social climate is being created and nurtured for the child and her/his family. The IEP will help measure whether or not the child is learning consonant with the goals set forth in the IEP. The extent to which the child is learning will help assess the efficacy of the educational curricula. Good oversight should always look at overall learning success and parental engagement.

As mayor, we made a concerted effort to have our students with disabilities receive educational services closer to home and increase our local capacity without compromising the quality of their education. The Council has the power of oversight and legislation, and both can be used to ensure that students with special needs are receiving the services they require to succeed. We should look not only to the test scores, but also listen to the students with special needs, their parents/guardians/caregivers, advocates, instructors and school personnel to understand their experience and how we can improve.

We speak frequently of having inclusive classrooms; but to achieve that, we must invest the resources necessary to support these endeavors.

14. What accountability measures can you put into place to ensure that schools are staffed appropriately? What significant, unique policies would you put into place that would drastically increase the support and retention of teachers and administrators in DCPS?

In theory, between the UPSFF and the comprehensive staffing model, the staffing needs of our schools should be met. We know that is not always the case. Many school budgets do not completely meet the needs of their student population, including many students also have additional challenges and needs, including disabilities and trauma. Despite targeted at-risk funding meant to meet at least part of the need, equity and sufficiency of resources is still a challenge facing our public education system. The example of at-risk funding is one that informs my thinking on this issue. Initially intended to supplement other school funding and target supports for at-risk students, schools have used some funds to support core staff. This illustrates the need that schools have for more funding for staff. I support efforts to reexamine how we approach public school funding, and I co-introduced the School Based Budgeting and Transparency Amendment Act of 2019, which, among other things, would require DCPS to use a school-based budgeting model to fund schools. I co-introduced it as a way of examining school-based budgeting in its theoretical and



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practical application, and systemically and thoroughly moving towards a better funding approach to support our public schools.

Teaching is difficult and staying in the teaching profession can sometimes be even harder. Based on available data, anywhere between 8-50% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years. High workloads, perceived lack of support, and work-life balance can all contribute to dissatisfaction with the profession.

It is important to work in partnership with key stakeholders, advocates and others who have their fingers on the pulse of real issues facing the District's public education system, including teacher turnover. As consistent with our legislative and oversight role, the Council should ensure that our public education system has the resources required to effectively support new teachers, among other key priorities defined by Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), and Public Charter School Board (PCSB). There is a wide variety of ways that agencies can advance the goal of ensuring the effectiveness and retention of new teachers, from mentorship programs, to professional development, to effective school level management that creates supportive and inclusive learning environments for all staff. Where there are legislative or regulatory barriers to any of these strategies, the Council should be proactive in addressing those barriers.

Criminal Justice

15. Describe one aspect of an effective safety plan that would lower crime rates in DC without infringing on the constitutional rights of DC residents.

I have been and continue to be an advocate of the NEAR Act. As the Ward 7 Councilmember, I use my position to advance policy and legislation to meet the needs of Ward 7 residents and the goals of the NEAR Act.

I will continue to ensure a more transparent budget process, help to establish long-and short-term objectives and priorities, oversee the performance of MPD staff, programs and policies and ensure the effectiveness of these programs. I voted in support of the Access to Body Worn Camera Footage Emergency Act and have sent a series of letters to MPD calling for the release of stop-and-frisk data pursuant to the NEAR Act. I meet regularly with Sixth District Commander Habeebullah to maintain an open dialogue regarding



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community policing, NEAR Act implementation, crime and violence prevention and other public safety initiatives.

I have worked tirelessly to direct funding to NEAR Act programs and am a full supporter of the Cure the Streets initiative. The amendment I moved regarding sports wagering also secured a statutory dedication of 50% of all additional certified sports wagering net revenue over the next four years, and then, beginning in Fiscal Year 2024, 50% of all sports wagering net revenue will be dedicated to NEAR Act implementation, which is projected to be over \$15 million per year.

Nationally, relationships between the police and many African Americans are challenged. This has been abundantly evident in the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. This presents us with a unique opportunity in the nation's capital to forge a relationship between Ward 7 residents and our police that serves as a model – one that embraces community policing and lowers crime. Relationships between Ward 7 residents and the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) have generally been positive though not everyone has had a positive experience. We must continue to enhance community policing and look for ways to strengthen relationships between residents and MPD.

16. How would you improve reentry programs for returning citizens to ensure they are connected to gainful employment, education, and their families?

I have supported legislation in support of our returning citizens and our incarcerated community members that will decrease the stigma and barriers they face making it easier for them to advocate for policies affecting their lives and to find stable housing, jobs and careers which lead to a reduction in recidivism rates. For example, I co-introduced the Restore the Vote Amendment Act of 2019 which would expand voting rights for residents incarcerated for felony convictions. I also co-introduced the Criminal Record Expungement Amendment Act of 2019 to expand the definition of an eligible felony with regard to sealing records and making all misdemeanors eligible for sealing.

Prior to taking office, I hosted a Ward 7 Action Summit in December 2016 in an effort to prioritize my legislative goals. At the Ward 7 Action Summit, participants were asked what the most effective services were the government could provide to reduce recidivism. The two most recommended solutions involved: (1) connecting returning citizens to jobs, and (2) boosting educational and job skills training. These two recommendations go hand in hand. The District government needs to infuse an added educational component into our



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D.C. Jail and federal prisons that house our residents. Many people passing through our jail simply don't have the marketable skill sets to succeed when they are released. We should also explore ways to expand more programs to federal prisons which house our District residents serving time for felony offenses. If we use distance learning options, we may be able to get our residents on a productive path, even while they serve time. The District's Department of Employment Services and Office of Returning Citizens Affairs should also expand their relationships with District residents who are incarcerated, so that returning citizens will have a stronger re-entry plan upon release. Finally, a recommended solution to reducing recidivism from the Ward 7 Action Summit involved making sure returning citizens can access needed educational, workforce and life skills services as well as case management.

Navigating the District government sometimes proves difficult even for residents who are intimately familiar with its inner workings. For a returning citizen, accessing the plethora of supports and services the District offers is daunting.

The Office of Returning Citizens Affairs should be strengthened so that it can provide and refer people to needed resources. Such coordination is why the office was created. I will continue to serve as a strong advocate for the District's returning citizens and ensure our efforts to support District inmates in the re-entry process serves to support their success.

Wages and Labor

17. What initiatives would you propose to ensure that minority- and woman-owned business enterprises are able to compete for projects, particularly District construction and development?

I am grateful to serve on the Committee on Business and Economic Development, which has oversight responsibility for the Department of Small and Local Business Development, and on the Committee on Facilities and Procurement, which has oversight responsibility for the Office of Contracting and Procurement and the Contract Appeals Board. Through my work on those committees and with their respective chairs, I have sought to ensure that opportunities for minority- and woman-owned business enterprises are both protected and maximized. I have also been a longtime supporter and funder of our Great Streets and Main Streets initiatives, and worked on behalf of individual Ward 7 minority- and woman-owned businesses to assist them with issues they have brought to my office's attention. In addition, I have supported legislative initiatives to meet the needs of our small businesses. For example, I cosponsored Bill 23-0432, the Protecting Local Area



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Commercial Enterprises Amendment Act of 2019, which would establish a program to assist legacy businesses, those that have been LSDBE certification eligible for 15 consecutive years or Small Business Enterprise (SBE) eligible for 10 consecutive years and contributed to the history or identity of the District or its neighborhoods, to provide a commercial lease renewal process and financial assistance to landlords and eligible legacy business. I also cosponsored Bill 23-0549 - Local Business Support Amendment Act of 2019, which would create a local business ombudsman within the Department of Small Local Business Development as a neutral resource for current and prospective DC business owners to provide potential resolutions of complaints and concerns regarding opening and maintaining a business, and designates agency-wide Officers for Small and Local Business Inclusion.

I will continue this collaborative and innovative work in support of CBEs and specifically woman- and minority-owned businesses, to meet their ongoing and evolving needs.

Government Accountability

18. Do you believe that the current DC Council represents the interests of the broad public? If not, what segments of the public are underrepresented?

The District of Columbia is a diverse city with several constituency groups. While the Council, through a representative democracy, is the legislative body with members that represent roughly equivalent numbers of people (and at-large members as well that represents the entire District), the District, like many jurisdictions, has residents whose needs and desires are not as well attended to. As Ward 7 Councilmember, I see not only the education disparities, economic opportunity disparities, and health disparities that have not yet sufficiently changed, and I have worked hard through legislation and oversight to attract economic development, improve and expand education (e.g., by increasing education funding and introducing Birth to Three for All DC, getting it enacted and achieving some of the funding for it), and development of a comprehensive health care system. I am also proud of my long-time support of and relationship with the District's immigrant communities, LGBTQ communities and the work I have done to protect and advance their respective interests through healthcare, rights protection and services. Through our democracy, we try to get the representative numbers right, but the DC



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Council and the broader community must also work to meet the needs of our residents that have not yet been fully met.

19. How will you demonstrate accessibility and responsiveness to your constituents?

Constituent services is a vital part of work for any elected official. However, I recognize that not all residents feel certain services are accessible or even deemed to be for them. When a resident calls my office with a problem, I want that resident to be assured that they will receive first-rate constituent services.

The reason I ran for the Ward 7 Council seat is that I didn't believe Ward 7 residents were receiving the most effective constituent services despite efforts by those who tried very hard to effectively deliver those services. To that end, I have implemented a constituent services feedback survey for Ward 7 residents. To date, we have received much feedback from residents, and this has served to be vital information in implementing necessary adjustments and changes to ensure we are delivering effective efficient constituent services to our residents. And I want our residents to understand that we want their feedback.

20. This is the first campaign cycle conducted with the Fair Elections Program, which provides public financing for candidates who adhere to small-dollar contribution limits. Do you believe that a candidate who is not participating in this program can adequately represent the views of all residents of the District?

Yes. I supported campaign finance reform and introduced a bill that ultimately was included in the legislation enacted by the Council.

21. Other suggested campaign reforms include ranked-choice voting and lowering the voting age to 16. What changes would you support to ensure that our elections truly represent the will of the people?

I support efforts to expand and protect the voting franchise. As a native Washingtonian, life-long public servant in the District of Columbia and African-American, I hold voting in high esteem because I know what it is to be a citizen and yet not have a vote or voting representation in a supposedly representative democracy. I was a co-introducer of the Youth Vote Amendment Act of 2018, which would have lowered the voting age to 16. I also co-introduced Bill 23-0324, the Restore the Vote Amendment Act of 2019 which would extend the voting franchise to residents incarcerated for a felony. I also co-introduced Bill 22-0312, the D.C. Voting Rights Notification Act of 2017, which, among other things,



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mandates the provision of a voter registration application to an incarcerated qualified elector and the development of notification requirements to provide verbal and written notification to individuals with felony convictions of their right to vote. I will support efforts to both strengthen and protect our democracy and the full and free exercise thereof. I will continue to work assiduously in support of statehood which ultimately establishes a full ---for our citizens.

Ward-Specific Questions

22. (Ward 2 Candidates Only) Will you commit to supporting the winner of the Democratic primary in the June 16 special election and/or the general election in November? Why or why not?

23. (Ward 4 Candidates Only) Councilmembers often have to strike a balance between supporting the mayor's priorities and providing independent representation for their constituents. How does your vision for Ward 4 differ from Mayor Bowser?

24. (Ward 7 Candidates Only) Do you support extending the streetcar on H Street east to Benning Road Metro? How would you work to ensure that projects like this provide connections with the rest of the city while limiting displacement among current Ward 7 residents?

Yes, I support extending the streetcar on H Street east to Benning Road Metro. It is imperative that DDOT, as the designated transportation agency, work closely with WMATA and residents to ensure coordinated linkages with bus service, Metro trains and all forms of public transit with the goals of ensuring consonance with the understanding of public sentiments and needs. If we listen to and strive to meet public goals, it is difficult to go too far wrong.

It is also essential to continue to work forward in addressing food deserts and connecting access to health care services, thus ensuring linkages between the two eastern most Wards (7 & 8) in the city.

25. (Ward 8 Candidates Only) Given Ward 8 still exists within a food desert, with a lack of healthcare facilities, what are your plans to bring sustainable services and retail partners to the community moving forward?



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