

Kelvin Brown is a Hillcrest resident who served honorably in the US Army for nearly ten years and was deployed on three tours of duty, leading to a promotion to the rank of Sergeant. After his enlistment ended Kelvin became a highly effective high school teacher, teaching Algebra I and Geometry. Currently, Kelvin manages a multi-million dollar portfolio of affordable housing projects for a national housing finance agency based in Washington, DC. Kelvin currently possesses a Bachelor of Science degree in criminal justice and a Master of Business Administration degree (MBA), to include a number of professional industry certifications.

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 currently seeking the Ward 7 Council Member seat on the DC Council. I decided to run for office because Ward 7 deserves a council member who will ensure our community is a part of the decision making process and our ideas and opinions are always valued.

As council member, I would focus on working with our community, advocates and elected leaders to 1) fully fund our schools and implement vocational training programs, 2) increase access to quality health care across the ward, 3) bring economic investments for small business owners and homeowners (more sustainable, affordable homes and rental units), including good paying jobs for our youth and job seeking neighbors, and 4) work with MPD, DBH and other organizations to tackle crime via a health base approach.

Budget

2. Do you consider the District's total current budget to be too large, too small, or

about

right? Please
explain.

- Currently, DC has a large budget that is bigger than nearly thirteen states. However, we have an opportunity to ensure that our tax dollars are equitably distributed to all DC residents regardless of zip code, social economic status or race. DC doesn't have a budget problem; I believe we have a prioritization and planning problem.

As council member, I would be very strategic in developing a vision for a greater ward 7 that is supplemented and supported by key focus areas that are aligned with my neighbor's ideas and opinions.

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?

- The safety net has changed substantially in the past twenty years. While direct cash assistance to individuals has lessened to some degree, the Earned Income Tax Credit has increased. Historically, the traditional forms of non-cash assistance such as Food Stamps, WIC, Head Start, Medicaid and Medicare, now take a more substantial role in the safety net than it has in the past. The ACA is now the largest recent expansion to the safety net. ACA includes subsidies to help pay for individual health insurance and allows states to cover additional low-income families under Medicaid by providing Federal matching funds.

As council member, I would fight to ensure that we adjust the safety net to include these and other similar programs to ensure that more residents have access to needed funds and critical programs.

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?

- The health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic has

devastated

communities across ward 7 and the District. Our focus should be squarely on ensuring we safeguard the health and wellness of our most vulnerable populations. Our seniors, disabled veterans and our homeless neighbors must be acknowledged and supported even more during this pandemic.

As council member, I would work with other legislators, community members, small business owners and our non-profit sectors to gather innovative ideas to close the budget gap. Raising taxes on our most impacted residents is not the answer and we must push ourselves to develop lasting solutions where everyone is involved and participants in the recovery process.

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?

- Safety and accessibility to efficient, reliable transportation options is critical to key DC

moving and lessen the environmental burden on our planet. Key components of a safe, sustainable and smart transportation system must provide access to all residents across DC. As a city we must invest in quality, affordable, and multi-modal transportation infrastructure to ensure all of our neighbors across the city have equitable access.

As council member, I will strongly support the call and advocacy to develop meaningful policies, based on transportation and resident wellness data, to support the need for informed data driven design, dedicated bus lanes, protected bicycle infrastructure and reliable public transportation, including vehicle parking. In addition, I would look throughout the nation for additional transportation best practices that we could implement here in DC to improve our overall transportation infrastructure.

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?

- Unfortunately, food deserts are not common throughout the entire District.

These

deserts exist in full force across the river in Wards 7 & 8. Residents do not have ready access to a variety of grocery stores within a short distance to their homes. Residents East of the River must travel to Maryland or across the bridge to Northwest to purchase groceries.

As council member, I would examine a variety of options such as urban garden zoning through private-public partnerships, introduce legislation to help fund initiatives to establish food co-ops, mobile markets, and lastly, as needed, provide incentives to build state of the art grocery stores within walking distancing of each community.

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?

- Unfortunately, we never won the war on homelessness, and with COVID-19, the number of homeless individuals will only increase. The District government has ensured that individuals will not be evicted, lose their electricity, water, and or gas, which definitely helps, but once COVID-19 is over, these bills will become due. Plans must be put in effect to ensure these bills are either forgiven or the residents are given a realistic time period in which to repay the bills that have increased monthly while they were unemployed or receiving Unemployment Insurance.

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

- I advocate and fight for Affordable Housing and Rent Control with Fannie Mae

as I manage multi-million-dollar housing projects in DC and around the country. When enacted, the Reclaim Rent Control campaign would expand and strengthen rent control, protect affordable housing, and drastically increase the number of units protected by rent control. DC, as most major cities, is in the midst of an affordable housing crisis. As of September 2019, Washington, DC was the 6th most expensive city to be a renter in the U.S. There are over 40,000 people on the wait list for subsidized housing and over 6,000 people are sleeping on streets or in

shelters each night. Almost half of DC residents pay more than 30% of their income in rent, and one in five spend more than 50% of their income on rent.

Each time rents are increased, DC residents are forced to move further away from their communities, families, schools, hospitals, public transportation, and other vital resources. Low-income residents—often people of color, seniors, people with disabilities, and immigrants— are the most affected by skyrocketing rents and uninhabitable conditions. When rents increase and people are forced out of their homes, communities fall apart and everyone suffers.

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?

- Specifically, wards EOTR have not experience the amount of economic investment as

other wards across the District. All of my neighbors recognize that ward 7 has not been included in the economic equity that has benefited other wards and neighborhoods across the District. This is a travesty and clearly a social justice issue. As a city we must do more to ensure economic prosperity flows to every ward and every community. No community should have to go without having access to quality food options, affordable health care or entertainment amenities.

As council member, I will work to introduce legislation to enhance ward 7 through making sound investment in our greatest assets – our people. Only through investing in the creative talents and aspirations of our neighbors and communities will start to see positive change. That investment starts with creating more opportunities for good paying jobs, vocational training and adult education, and providing additional resources to our small business owners who want to do business in ward 7 – just to name a few.

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

- I believe that as a city we shouldn't "use a broad brush" when revitalizing the entire city. Each community across the District has its own distinctive culture,

morays and values

and those must be honored in order to protect community culture and integrity. The residents must have a seat at table for any discussion that involves communal changes.

As council member, I will ensure that my community (ward 7) is always at the decision- making table and that our collective ideas and opinions are always valued. We must respect community norms and culture.

Educati on

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

- My vision for public education in the District is simple! First and foremost, we must finally fully fund our schools! We owe every child in the District a quality education, regardless of where they live, the color of their skin, a child's special needs, or their economic background. Our children deserve all of the tools and resources needed to succeed in life. As parents, lawmakers, and the government, we are morally and ethically responsible for ensuring that every District child leaves high school either equipped with a skill or trade to enter the work force, or prepared to enter college. We can no longer justify providing our youth with only partial school funding. We must invest fully in their education, cut costs in other areas where we can, and develop initiatives to bring more money into the District and earmark those funds specifically to the education system.

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

- Currently, there are ten city-owned school buildings currently sitting vacant. If reopened, these schools could serve thousands of additional students. Many public charter schools with strong academic performance and high demand from families are seeking to open in some of these vacant buildings, but only one of these buildings have been awarded to public charter schools in the past five years.

The fact that there are high performing proven charter schools that are ready, willing, and able to move into our neighborhoods and provide and serve our

students should be addressed. If elected, I would introduce legislation that would remove the impediments in the way of these charter schools enabling them to grow and serve more students.

Yes, if elected I would support and advocate the right of charter schools to have timely access to unused and underutilized public-school buildings. I will advocate on behalf of leasing, selling or co-mingling unused schools for the education of our children. These vacant buildings are the same buildings that years ago were the local schools the community children attended. They are centrally located and are within the boundaries of students that currently must travel across the Wards or across the city to attend better schools. It is a travesty to leave a building vacant when there are qualified, proven educational entities interested in providing our children with a quality education.

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

- We are not providing our children with the appropriate mental health support or services to help with the challenges they face daily, both inside and outside school. The figures are alarming but true. 1 in 5 children have a diagnosable mental health disorder (Center for Disease Control and Prevention's 2013 Children's Mental Health Report). Almost half of all children in DC have had at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and 22% of children have experienced more than one (2016 National Survey of Children's Health). And, if left unaddressed, these factors can result in chronic physical health issues, lower academic performance, can contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, as well as lower life expectancy. This is especially true for children with 6 or more ACE's (American Journal of Preventative Medicine). All school staff should be trained in Trauma-Informed and Restorative Practices and receive on-going coaching and support to quickly identify needs and implement those practices.

Students should have access to trained mental health professionals within the school at all times in order to support them. This requires collaboration among adults within the schools as well as across health and social services agencies and organizations. Schools need high quality, evidenced-based SEL programs to meet students where they are and to help them develop the skills they will need to succeed in college, careers and life. We need to provide schools with

resources to teach students SEL skills so they can be successful in both school and life.

As council member, I intend to ensure there is continued funding for Out-of-School (OST) time programs. Statistics show for every \$1.00 invested in after-school programming, the city saves \$3.00 due to higher school performance and lower rates of crime. A lack of a summer enrichment or engagement program during elementary school years accounts for two-thirds of the achievement gap between low income and high-income students. Historically, OST programs support working parents by ensuring their child has a safe, productive environment in the hours outside of the school day.

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?

- As council member, I support examining a performance-based teacher evaluation process that takes into consideration student growth on standardized tests, demographic/societal data and overall student needs when entering their grade levels. I believe it's imperative that our teachers are qualified, responsible for the students that they are entrusted to teach, and have the necessary resources and support to care for children/youth. We must fully equip our teachers with the necessary resources, professional training/development opportunities and support to educate our children/youth.

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.

- A key tenant of a twenty-first century safety plan starts and ends with ensuring our residents have access to high quality education and behavior support services. Studies have shown that education is a great equalizer and directly helps to

reduce crime. In fact, the results of defunding our schools and cutting vocational training can be seen in our increased crime rates.

As council member, I will work to ensure our schools are fully funded and have ample vocational and after school programs available for our youth. We must provide the necessary behavior support and access to jobs for our residents. This will help decrease crime across the District.

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

- The District must partner with federal and non-profit organizations to develop vocational training programs that include housing and life skills training to ensure that once our returning citizens have paid their debt to society, they can find gainful employment and housing to take care of themselves and their families. These programs should start while they are incarcerated.

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?

- Currently there are DC laws requiring companies that are awarded multi-million-dollar federal contracts to offer first preference to, and, to employ District of Columbia residents. However, when companies violate the programs under the Department of Employment Services, such as First Source, various Apprenticeship Programs, and Work Opportunity Tax Credit Programs, they must be fined, denied further contracts, or have their contract revoked.

As council member, I will work to ensure we have stricter oversight into contracts and hiring throughout the District and thereby ensuring our residents, including small business owners have true access to quality jobs.

**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?

- Simply put NO! The DC Council does not represent the interest of the broad public. In fact, I believe that underserved black and brown communities, homeless persons, disabled veterans and other minority groups across ward 7 and the District are often forgotten when legislation is enacted.

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

- As council member, I will work to change the narrative that our DC Council doesn't work on behalf of its residents. In fact, I will promptly establish quarterly town halls, virtual meet ups and mail/email campaigns to ensure my neighbors are up to date on all legislative matters. These meetings would serve a dual purpose to: 1) update residents and 2) gain input and feedback on constituent concerns.

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?

- I believe the Fair Election Act levels the playing field enabling individual with a passion and desire to effect change have an opportunity to run and represent their communities. By not participating in the new Fair Election Program certainly doesn't mean that a candidate doesn't or won't represent their community. However, not participating in the program does open the door for unscrupulous backroom deals, handshake agreements and other forms of political corruption and unsavory, unethical behaviors. So, my question to a candidate that doesn't opt into the program is what are you losing by not accepting PAC, developer and lobbyist money?

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?

- Campaign reform is necessary and essential to ensure every resident in the District of Columbia has a fair say in our democratic election process. We owe all of our citizens the right to be safe in their choice of representation and fair access to the ballot box.

As council member, I would strongly support and advocate to ensure fairness, transparency and equitable access to the ballot box for all communities across ward 7 and the District. I would study the impacts of decreasing the voter age to 16, implement a standard vote by mail program and introduce legislation to declare election day a District wide holiday. In addition, I would commission a study group to determine other options for voting, such as electronic voting via computer or smart phone, to increase voter turn while maintaining safeness, soundness and voter integrity. If we can encrypt our banking and financial institutions processes then we can surly do the same for voting.

Ward-Specific Questions

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?

- Economic invest in ward 7 is long overdue and has been nonexistent for the last 10-15 years. While other wards across DC have benefited from the rising tide of prosperity residents in ward 7 have not. As a city we have a duty and obligation to ensure that economic investments flows from Deanwood to Hillcrest and all communities in between. Every resident should have the ability to age in place and share in DC's prosperity.

As council member, I will ensure that ward 7 communities are involved and

engaged in the decision making process and our ideas and opinions are always valued. In addition, I will work tirelessly to make sure that development is done in a responsible way that takes into account the values and opinions of current residents. Communication and education will be top priority to keep my neighbors informed. Together we will invest in our collective futures.