



2014 Mayoral Candidates Questionnaire Democratic Primary April 1, 2014



Good Faith Communities Coalition, an organization of DC faith communities, in cooperation with Foundry United Methodist Church, The Way Home campaign and Fair Budget Coalition, initiated this questionnaire.



The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information to help voters prior to the April Democratic primary evaluate Mayoral candidates' commitment to social justice, to addressing affordable housing issues and to responding to the current DC shelter crisis.



All 8 candidates for mayor certified to participate in the primary were sent questionnaires. Candidate's responses up to the 100 word limit are printed verbatim. If a response from a particular candidate does not appear, no response was received from that candidate by the deadline.

**Sponsoring Partners for the
2014 Questionnaire for
Mayoral candidates in the
Democratic Primary, April 1,
2014.**

None of sponsoring organizations endorse or support specific candidates for public office. We hope that you will read the entire questionnaire and use it to help you make an informed choice on April 1, 2014.

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**Democratic Primary Election for Mayor
Tuesday April 1, 2014**

Foundry United Methodist Church,
www.foundryumc.org
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Early voting and absentee voting available.

The Way Home, Ending Chronic
Homelessness in DC
www.thewayhomedc.org
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Voting information: www.dcboee.org

Fair Budget Coalition
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DC primaries are held only for partisan offices such as Mayor and Council members. Only the Democratic, Republican, DC Statehood Green, and Libertarian parties have qualified to hold primaries in the District of Columbia.

Because primaries are party elections, only voters registered with the Democratic Party may vote in the April 1st primary election.

INTRODUCTION

We believe that a covenant exists between the government and the community. This covenant is reflected in the District budget and in the city's programs and services. The money we as a community invest and the programs we support with this investment must reflect our values. They define the community we want to live in. We can't ever accept the status quo as the best or only future that is possible:

- 6,865 persons in the city were counted as homeless on one night in January 2013. **(Interagency Council on Homelessness, Point in Time Count 2013)**
- 30% of DC children under 18 live at or below the poverty line. **(DC Kids Count Report 2012)**
- On February 2, 2014 (Super Bowl Sunday), 768 families with 1458 children were living in DC shelters, transitional housing or motels. Many of these families had experienced domestic violence. **(Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness. Daily Census)**
- The DC Alliance of Youth Advocates reports that there are more than 1600 unaccompanied homeless youth on the city's streets over the course of a year. **(MW Council Of Governments Report 2011)**
- On any given night in DC there are nearly 1,800 individuals and families living on the streets and in shelters who are considered chronically homeless. Chronic homelessness is defined as long term or repeated homelessness, often coupled with a disability. **(Interagency Council on Homelessness, Point In Time Count, 2013)**

The following questionnaire poses 5 questions in 5 major areas related to homelessness and affordable housing as currently being experienced in the District of Columbia. The questions are accompanied by facts and considerations that could be addressed in the responses.

Safety Net – strengthening the safety net.

Chronic Homelessness – addressing this specific group of homeless.

Families – Homeless, In Shelter, In Transitional Housing – achieving housing stability.

Affordable Housing – investment to increase the affordable housing stock.

Outcome Measures and Transparency – measuring effectiveness and making it public.

I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. Martin Luther King, Nobel Prize Acceptance, Oslo. 1964

Safety Net

Facts: Self-sufficiency, with no or very limited safety net, is not easy for many who are poor to achieve and sustain. Unstable income, family resources and public support must be knit together month to month just to survive. The current administration's safety net philosophy is that long-term dependence on government programs creates a culture of dependence that is not only unaffordable with public funds, but also not healthy for the individual or family. The safety net at its most effective, it is thought, should provide short term emergency support that leads to employment and thus self-sufficiency.

- **What would you do as Mayor to strengthen the District's safety net in a way that provides stability for the poor and vulnerable and is also cost effective and financially supportable over the long term?** In your answer, consider the following: the goal of the current safety net is almost exclusively focused on employment to be achieved by every adult quickly. A worker earning the current minimum wage must work approximately 132 hours, 52 weeks a year to afford a 2 bedroom apartment at market rate (\$1,412 per month).

Muriel Bowser: I will protect the Housing Production Trust Fund by fully funding it with at least \$100 million each budget year. I will also provide housing assistance to families who need help filling the gap between what is reasonable to spend on housing and the market rate. I will fully fund the two best programs we have to do this—Rapid-Rehousing and the Local Rent Supplement Program—and work with our providers and advocates to make sure these important programs are optimized. These programs are far more cost effective than renting motel rooms for families.

Vincent C. Gray: Long-term dependence on the safety net is not the best solution for many of our vulnerable neighbors. Safety net benefits will never be generous enough to ensure families are not living in poverty. Our strategy is to help clients get jobs and support them to gradually increase their income until they are self-sufficient. We have made several system improvements, including completing assessments with all TANF customers resulting in better services for families. Future improvements will include implementing a web-based application/recertification system to distribute benefits more quickly and improve efficiency. I am also committed to significant additional investments in affordable housing.

Jack Evans: While I am a firm advocate for safety net programs, I believe a long-term approach must balance current funding priorities with policies that encourage growth in our tax base over the long term. This insures continued funding for our safety net programs in the future. Programs such as the Housing Production Trust Fund have and continue to produce wonderful secondary effects of enabling tenants to become homeowners, attain stability and enter the middle class.

That is why I advocated for the “Ready to Work” legislation to review and enhance workforce readiness of young District residents. As Mayor, I will advance wrap-around services for our families and partner with existing nonprofits that provide services such as specialized skills-training, clothing, daycare, and transportation while offering employees incentives to hire the long-term unemployed.

Tommy Wells: I will:

- increase the standard income tax deduction so low- and moderate- income workers can keep more of what they earn;
- elevate enforcement of wage and labor laws under a new Department of Labor and combat wage theft;
- enforce First Source law so all city contractors hire DC workers as required under city-funded development projects;
- create a new Department of Workforce Development to coordinate efforts, beginning with a first-ever unified profile of the barriers to employment faced by each DC resident applying for services;
- identify emerging employment sectors, deliver workforce training programs aligned with job opportunities, and place job seekers.

Chronic Homelessness

Facts: The DC Department of Human Services' *Housing First* program has ended homelessness for 1,596 individuals and families since 2008. *Housing First*, a nationally recognized best practice, targets the most vulnerable with housing and supportive services. Today approximately 1,800 individuals and families living on the streets and in shelters in DC for years would benefit from *Housing First*. *Housing First* often costs the same or less than leaving people homeless, due to decreased costs of emergency services, health care and criminal justice involvement.

- **Briefly outline your approach to serving District residents who are chronically homeless.** In your answer consider the following: Although the *Housing First* model is accepted as a proven approach, additional funding is necessary to meet the needs of the approximately 1,800 chronically homeless still on the street and in shelters. *The Way Home* campaign believes the District can end chronic homelessness by 2017, As a first step towards that goal, the campaign urges the District to end chronic veteran's homelessness by the Federal goal of 2015.

Muriel Bowser: I will not treat our homeless families like emergency flood victims, housing them in city recreation centers. I will work to quickly identify affordable apartments in a timelier manner for families experiencing homelessness. I will fully staff the Department of Human Services, and make funds available to assist families in exiting the homeless system. Transitional housing units, made available to families who need them, can be the stepping stone to permanent housing. Emergency shelter should only be used for emergencies. I support a housing first approach, not a shelter for the night approach.

Jack Evans: In addition to enhancing existing programs, I will propose legislation ensuring permanent supportive housing through Housing First. As Mayor, I will work with stakeholders such as DCAYA, The Way Home, and Good Faith to develop a fully funded platform to end chronic homelessness.

I worked to establish the Interagency Council on homelessness to coordinate with organizations to identify, track, and offer solutions to end homelessness among populations hit hardest, including veterans. I also passed the "Returning Veteran's Tax Credit," which encourages businesses to hire veterans and championed funding to local organizations housing homeless veterans through the "Southeast Veteran's Access Housing."

Vincent C. Gray: I strongly believe the Housing First philosophy is the right intervention for our most vulnerable, chronically homeless residents. This is why I have increased local funding for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) from \$9.4 million to \$21.4 million (127%) since FY2010. I have also made a \$187 million investment in affordable housing production and the 2013 DHCD Super NOFA will create an additional 430 permanent supportive housing units- 44% of the total units funded. We will continue our investments in PSH and I recently announced that I will commit the resources necessary to end chronic veterans' homelessness in the District of Columbia.

Tommy Wells: Rather than moving homeless individuals from streets to shelter to transitional housing and, finally, to an apartment, Housing First immediately moves homeless residents into a stable apartments. This approach has proven that rather than making successful treatment of substance use and other issues a condition of receiving housing, providing housing first actually improves an individual's chances of recovery from other issues that led to homelessness. As chairman of the Council's Human Services Committee, I promoted Housing First, and as Mayor I will expand the program by increasing its annual funding by \$10 million.

Families - Homeless, in Shelter or Transitional Housing

Facts: Thirty years ago, homelessness was predominantly experienced by single adults. Homelessness among children did not exist in the same way it does today. Three key factors have influenced the change: loss of affordable housing; changes in employment along with large scale unemployment and low wages; safety net assistance that has not kept pace with the cost of living.

In its 2013-2014 Winter Plan the Interagency Council on Homelessness predicted the need for 467 family shelter placements during hypothermia season 2013-2014 in addition to the 271 already filled slots at the family shelter at DC General. The plan states that "the District expects to use a variety of resources to provide placements..." In reality only short term solutions were implemented to address the emergency which soon became a crisis: 768 families reported in shelter, transitional housing and in motels. These families collectively have more than 1,400 children.

- **What steps would you take to address the crisis of homelessness among families with children?** In your answer, consider the following: the approved Winter Plan defines the current shelter situation as an immediate emergency to be treated as such. Having a variety of interventions to meet the needs of families is critical to addressing the family homelessness crisis. While Rapid Re-housing is currently the model most often cited as the housing solution for the vast majority of families who are homeless, other models, some longer-term, may be required for some families to achieve and sustain housing stability.

Muriel Bowser: We must provide transitional housing units with additional services. Many families end up in shelters because young parents often lack the knowledge of how to manage a family's budget, and the skills to land a job that pays a living wage. I will also work with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's task force on homelessness to convene a regional summit to create immediate action steps. We must work together as a region to help our neighbors who need us, the District cannot and should not bear the burden of this crisis alone.

Vincent C. Gray: Since emergency shelter must be the last resort I have focused on increasing stable, long-term housing arrangements. I recently introduced a plan to further improve our system for serving homeless families. This plan includes moving families from shelter to housing more quickly, ensuring we take advantage of all opportunities to keep families in their communities, re-introducing provisional shelter legislation to allow for alternative housing arrangements when appropriate, and continuing to invest in affordable housing. We use a nationally recognized tool to match families with the most appropriate program, which may be Rapid Re-Housing or a different intervention such as PSH.

Jack Evans: We know that 8% (7,354) of youth under 18 experience homelessness. However, only 300 designated youth beds exist. The "D.C. Homelessness Services Reform Act" implements policies to help families in need of housing. I believe in its goal of preventing families from becoming homeless, moving families out of shelters and into housing quickly as possible.

Although it is estimated roughly 10% of the population identifies as LGBT, identifying members account for 30% of youth receiving homeless services. That is why I co-sponsored the "LGBTQ Homeless Youth Reform Act" to develop policies to reduce the rate of homelessness within this community.

Tommy Wells: I support emergency bridge funding and rent supplements to help qualified residents remain in their neighborhoods, with a portion exclusively for seniors. I will end tax lien sales to third-party, for-profit buyers. When the government must foreclose, we will convert it to affordable housing. I will increase funding for rapid rehousing to extend its benefits to more at-risk residents. I also will work with housing advocates to improve the program by increasing assurances that landlords can count on rent payments over the long term and residents don't have to fear they will end up in a shelter when subsidies end.

Affordable Housing

Facts: Since 2000 the number of low cost rental units in DC has dropped by 50%. 80% of low income DC residents (less than 30% of area median income) pay more than 30% of their income for rent, which is by definition unaffordable. The typical low income household spends almost 70% of income on housing. (DC Fiscal Policy Institute, Disappearing Act, May 7, 2012.)

In the past year \$187 million has been invested in affordable housing through the Housing Production Trust Fund, with the promise of 3,130 units of new and renovated housing units by 2020. It will take 2 to 3 years for these units to come on line. Many advocates and service providers feel that a substantial investment in the Trust Fund will be needed annually to meet the need for affordable housing at all levels.

- **What housing renovation and construction programs beyond direct city investment through the Housing Production Trust Fund do you consider promising for increasing and maintaining the affordable housing stock in the city? How would you increase the support and utilization of these programs?**

Muriel Bowser: Two programs that need shoring up are the Section 8 housing voucher program, and the Local Rent Supplement Program. We need to find better incentives for landlords to stay in the section 8 program, and follow the best practices of other jurisdictions that provide more housing options. Additionally, there is a lot we can do regarding the Rapid Return of surplus city-owned buildings, and building new and infill housing on city-owned land. I would also work to strengthen our Inclusionary Zoning requirements.

Jack Evans: As the Chair of the Committee on Finance and Revenue, I have a strong record of supporting tax incentives to create affordable housing throughout the District. I was instrumental in creating the Housing Strategy Task Force, which is designed to assess the quality and availability of housing for residents and workers at all income levels. I also introduced legislation to create a "Community Impact Fund," an offset program that provides support to the District's social benefit programs and could be utilized by the District to provide new revenue sources for various projects such as affordable housing.

Vincent C. Gray: Direct District investment through the HPTF is the most effective, efficient and expeditious government tool for increasing preservation and production of affordable housing at the ambitious scale I have set out. It has the infrastructure necessary to underwrite and monitor affordable housing, which is why I made the vast majority of my unprecedented \$100 million investment through the HPTF. In addition, to align HPTF and the various other affordable housing subsidy programs, last year DHCD developed a unified Super NOFA process. This process increased the efficiency of public investment and will result in shorter funding timelines for projects that require subsidy.

Tommy Wells: I will:

- fund the HPTF using 15% of transfer and recordation taxes and additional funds for an annual minimum of \$100 million;
- streamline the transfer/sale of affordable homeownership units and Home Purchase Assistance Program (HPAP) mortgages;
- create an expedited underwriting process for HPAP-qualified first-time homebuyers;
- commit to an increase in affordable housing stock of 1,800 units - and 300 units of limited equity cooperative housing each year;
- tie housing requirements to all city construction and development contracts;
- with government assets leverage trading them to require the construction of affordable and workforce housing.

Outcome Measures and Transparency

Facts: Making a difference comes from action. It charts a path from present to desired future. Though there is no such thing as perfect data, adopting goals and pathways to achieving these goals, collecting data and measuring results consistently in all social service programs as well as affordable building and renovation programs ensures efforts remain aligned and that all participants are held accountable - from government officials to non-profit service providers to the community. With such data, programs that show results can be supported and those that are less effective can be improved or retired. Currently, outcome measures for DC social service and affordable building and renovation programs showing current performance data are not readily available, shared or transparent.

- **Describe the steps you would take as Mayor to define goals and outcome measures for social service programs as well as for affordable building and renovation projects so that progress could be readily accessible to the public and could be evaluated for effectiveness and for progress against desired outcomes while assuring accountability for results.**

Muriel Bowser: The District's affordable housing programs must be effective, accountable, and economically efficient. My administration will organize and utilize the data created by all of the agencies across the government to improve results and foster accountability. I will also resume tracking measures the current administration has dropped, such as number of homeless veterans served. I will hold service provider contractors and city agencies accountable for delivering results. Through my Administration's open data policy, individuals, the private sector, non-profits, and academia will have access to data and I encourage all of them to become partners in this fight against homelessness.

Jack Evans: As Mayor, I am committed to working with stakeholders to improve accessibility, ensure transparency, champion data collection, and ensure it is used effectively. It is important that our social service programs are properly funded and staffed to serve our residents. I will expand resources, encourage feedback on the city website or agency websites and ensure audits and all public data is posted, easily accessible, and searchable.

Vincent C. Gray: My Administration has launched several data-focused initiatives related to social services and affordable housing. The DC Access System (DCAS) is a new social services eligibility and data solution that is integrated with DC Health Link. DCAS recently had a phase one rollout and will be expanded to cover more programs in subsequent phases. We are also developing an Affordable Housing Database to collect data on affordable housing stock and production as well as on client needs relating to affordable units and on-site services. The Database will have a phase one rollout this calendar year, with planned expansions in future years.

Tommy Wells: As a former social worker and non-profit executive I am uniquely qualified for this issue as I have managed these budgets and been accountable for my success and failure. As a progressive I will have an outcome based budget with real data and metrics like how many housing units provided, how many housed and how many moved on to permanent housing. The process should be transparent and open with funding levels and the data found online so anyone can see who gets what and understand the results.