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## 2023 8<sup>th</sup> District Councilmember Questionnaire

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### CANDIDATE CERTIFICATION

Candidate Name

I have read the attached questionnaire responses and certify that the information provided is accurate and the opinions stated accurately reflect my own positions.

Candidate Signature: Seth Anderson-Oberman Date: 1/14/2023

**Please complete the form inserting lines as needed to accommodate your answers,  
then sign and return the form via email in Word format to:**

**[info@phillynn.org](mailto:info@phillynn.org) and Gloria Gilman, [gmgilman@gmail.com](mailto:gmgilman@gmail.com). Mail a copy with the signature page to**

**Gloria Gilman  
121 S. Broad St., Suite 1710  
Philadelphia, PA 19107**

### I. INTRODUCTION

**In Section IV below, please answer as best you can. If you have not yet come to a final decision on an issue, or don't currently have enough information to provide an informed answer, please so state.**

### II. BACKGROUND

- 1. Tell us about your experience in leadership and administration. What policy issues have you worked on, and in what capacity? (Please provide the names of two or three individuals who can provide information about your previous work.)**

I've been a union organizer, in one capacity or another, for twenty three years. I started with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union in Washington DC. My first assignment was working with Ethiopian and Eritrean parking garage attendants fighting for a union and a living wage. Through mass action and sometimes facing arrest, these workers fought to improve their conditions and when they were arrested and went to jail, of course, I went to jail with them. Eventually they won their union and a living wage - and their courage inspired me to make organizing my life's work.

Later I worked with the American Federation of Teachers helping Philadelphia charter school teachers win a voice at work - against high teacher turnover and to improve the quality of education in their schools. The fight for the rights of teachers in charter schools was part of the broader fight of students, parents, teachers and communities against the installed School Reform Commission, an alliance of corporate privatizers and the Republican majority in Harrisburg (and a few Philly Democrats!)

In 2011, I accepted a promotion to become the Political Director for the American Federation Teachers New Jersey based in Perth Amboy. For seven years, I commuted daily between Philadelphia and North Jersey where I helped organize members to fight then-Governor Chris Christie's education cuts and attacks on the public pension system. I also led AFTNJ's efforts to elect poet and activist Ras Baraka the Mayor of Newark - on a platform to stop foreclosures, return Newark's schools to local control and reverse the widespread charterization of the school district. In 2015, NJ Citizen Action, a broad coalition of community and labor groups, made me a recipient of their Annual Citizen's Award for my leadership in efforts to pass the \$15 statewide minimum wage. During this time, I also ran multiple counties for the NJ AFL-CIO's political program over numerous election cycles, expanding labor's capacity and leading to a decisive win for Phil Murphy in 2017. Since Philadelphia's municipal elections occur off year, AFTNJ lent me to the Philadelphia Labor Council, AFL-CIO to help run their election year efforts. Staging out of the Working America office in Germantown, I pushed the Labor Council to expand into the NW and recruited unions to help mobilize voters in Nicetown, Germantown and Mt. Airy during the 2015 and 2016 cycles. On election day in 2016, more than 200 union members showed up to phonebank, knock doors and get out the vote all over the NW.

Since 2018, I have organized with our state's largest healthcare union, SEIU Healthcare PA. I organize healthcare workers in both the public and private sectors to stand together to improve patient care and strengthen working conditions. Shortly after joining SEIU, I supported members at Chestnut Hill Hospital to a hard fought contract victory that included reversing years of discriminatory pay and promotion practices. In 2019, I helped nurses from all across the Commonwealth bargain an historic contract with the state - aiming to overcome chronic staffing shortages at the state's public health facilities.

Wendell Royster, VP SEIU Healthcare Pa is very familiar with my work in the Philadelphia Labor for Black Lives Coalition.

Nat Bender, Director of Communications (former) at AFTNJ is very familiar with my work from 2011-2018.

My experience as a union organizer has given me a deep love for working people and a profound respect for our abilities to identify and work for solutions to the challenges we face. I approach problems with a spirit of real collaboration and look for every opportunity to support the growth and development of leaders and emerging leaders in the process of fighting for change. I am also very used to working with folks with a wide range of life experience and viewpoints and helping us find a path forward together.

### **3. With all the money that's being raised by other candidates, what's your path to victory in a crowded field?**

By organizing a robust grassroots fundraising operation, bolstered with significant contributions from movement allies, we plan to raise significant money to run an extremely strong, modern campaign driven by voter data, voter contact through doors, phones and texts with a sophisticated and targeted social media presence. Our goal, which we believe is achievable, is to knock 75k targeted doors to get us to a comfortable win number. In addition to the math driven approach, we most look forward to working with organizations, leaders and neighbors in the community to develop a robust neighbor to neighbor volunteer effort that strengthens our community's organizing capacity in the process. With the hopeful support of groups like Neighborhood Networks, the 22nd Ward Open Caucus, the Gray Panthers, DSA, Rep Rabb's supporters and others - we will have the benefit of strong organized support in the 22nd and 9th wards that will allow us to focus needed attention on doors in Germantown, Tioga, Nicetown and the parts of Logan we need to win. We don't have wealthy developer friends who can cut checks for \$12.6K without a second thought - but we'll know how to target our money much more effectively and strategically and our effort will be people powered and led by the community.

### **4. Where do you stand on Term Limits and Councilmanic Prerogative?**

I don't feel strongly about term limits one way or the other. I certainly understand why voters would want a way to get entrenched incumbents who work against the interests of the people out of office. This is especially true when one considers the corrupting influence of money on politics. My concern is that passing term limits also takes a democratic power away from the people. There's nothing inherently harmful about a four term incumbent who's fighting for the will of the people and earning their support and respect - FDR comes to mind. Denying people the ability to vote for someone they fought hard to elect just because others in office misuse their power seems like it could be an overcorrection, but I am open to being swayed.

I have a similar view about councilmanic prerogative as I do about term limits. In the hands of a thoughtful councilmember who's committed to reversing generations of racist and anti-working class zoning and development practices, councilmanic prerogative could be a powerful tool for community led planning with a focus on restorative justice. However, if used for personal gain to procure favors and kick-backs, as has too often been the rule - councilmanic prerogative can rightly be viewed as an obstacle to justice. I would rather end councilmanic prerogative than allow its ongoing abuse. Perhaps the best approach here is to fight for a transparent process with accountability measures and community access and approval points built in - a participatory process. I understand I have much to learn about the ways in which CP has been used - as well as the limits of those uses for good. I would like to hear the opinions of those who have more intimate knowledge of history and practices. Rest assured, I will work closely with coalition partners to understand your core priorities and actively bring you into any discussions and decisions on those priorities.

### III. PRIORITIES

#### 1. What in your opinion are the greatest challenges facing Nicetown/Tioga? West Germantown? East Germantown? Mt Airy and Chestnut Hill?

From start to finish, Germantown Avenue reflects one of the largest wealth disparities in the nation. It tells the story of racism and class struggle in Philadelphia and this country. On the southern end of the district, Nicetown and Tioga are two of the poorest areas in the poorest big city in the country. Income levels slowly rise, and populations become whiter as you wind your way up the avenue through Germantown and Mt. Airy. Eventually you reach Chestnut Hill - one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the country.

On one end - the history of Germantown Avenue tells the history of racist city planning: white flight, redlining, predatory lending, divestment of resources from Black communities. Now with gentrification rolling up the avenue - we're seeing resources coming back into neighborhoods; lots of new construction, big apartments going up - but little to none of it is affordable for the majority of people who currently live in our communities. This harmful process is forcing families who've lived here for generations to move in search of more affordable housing - only there isn't any. We know this also produces homelessness and raises crime rates.

On the other end, Germantown Ave in Chestnut Hill is home to huge mansions, many shops and restaurants and is a thriving, bustling community. This tells the other side of that same process - only it shows who's benefitted. The thing we need to reckon with about the current state of capitalism in America - is you can't have Chestnut Hill without having a whole bunch of Nicetowns. It takes a lot of poverty to support that kind of wealth.

If we're going to get serious about addressing racism, poverty, crime and the housing crisis, corporations must pay people significantly more. This means supporting and expanding workers rights to organize unions. We should also explore options that incentivize and compel corporations and business owners to pay living wages, possibly through changes to the City Business Tax and the creation of a City Wealth Tax.

We need to approach community planning and economic development from a restorative justice framework. It must be community-led, primarily by the Black and brown residents most harmed, and we must hold the people and institutions who've profited from this harm accountable for their actions. We should explore a city-based approach to reparations and seek to repair the harm done from decades of mass incarceration. Philadelphia's wealth must be put back into the hands of the workers

and people who created it in the first place - through higher wages, better public schools, quality public housing, publicly funded healthcare and more.

Those are the choices in front of us. We can create an economy where we all grow together - in ways we've already done and ways that are working in other parts of the country. Or we can continue down the 40 year path that led us to this point - a path dictated by finance capital and powerful multinational corporations. This is the path that has more or less united both political parties for the past 40 years. But it doesn't have to be this way. It hasn't always been this way and it's up to us to organize for the world we need and deserve.

## **2. What three things would you most want to accomplish to address 8th district challenges?**

1. District 8 will lead the city with innovative approaches to the housing crisis that centers the most vulnerable in planning and development. We will use every tool available to us and look to create new ones to help keep people in their homes and focus us on building truly affordable new housing options.
2. District 8 will change the city-wide discussion around safety and crime. We need a holistic and multi-layered approach to public safety that brings desperately needed resources into our communities with the highest rates of crime, targets efforts at poverty reduction and treats violence as the community healthcare crisis it is.
3. To accomplish the above or make serious progress on any of the other very serious challenges facing the people of District 8 (low wages, poorly funded schools, lack of access to healthcare, etc) we must unify around the district's core priorities and build out a plan to win. As someone who approaches problems with an organizer's lens, a major focus of my work will be helping to forge a culture of unity and solidarity within and across the district that centers the leadership of those who are hurting the most. I live by the old UNION saying, "an injury to one is an injury to all" and believe the people of the 8th district do as well. What we've lacked for many years is a leader on the City Council who can bring us together. I will change that.

## **IV. ISSUES**

### **A. Housing**

1. What would you do to change the trajectory of the housing crisis in the 8<sup>th</sup> district? What agency or program would you start with and why?

The first thing I would do is have a plan to engage the community, especially those most affected, around their housing experiences and seek to pull solutions from those discussions that invest community activists and leaders in the fightback process. To start we would look at ending the 10 year tax abatement program in the 8th District. This program fuels the kind of development that forces generational residents from their homes and robs our schools of the resources they need. We would also look to see how we could use Act 135, Imminent Domain and Councilmanic Prerogative to claim abandoned properties and repurpose them for truly affordable housing, including housing for the unhoused - also looking at options that expand Community Land Trust capacity and support CLT led projects. The idea with all of this is to change the culture of development from one where greedy developers (with no concern for our neighborhoods) decide

to one where the community works with good developers on a plan for sustainable and equitable development.

**2. How do you plan to help keep long-time homeowners from being forced out of their homes?**

We need to expand support for city, state and federal programs that provide assistance to homeowners who can't afford expensive repairs. We could look at creating some targeted grants and programs for property owners who live in zip codes experiencing the highest increases to housing costs. We could also support the creation of neighborhood based options like worker owned co-ops that train members of the community, including returning citizens, to do the needed home repairs in our neighborhoods at below market rate - while still paying very healthy wages. A win-win - this would keep the work and dollars in our community and provide reliable and affordable services for property owners who struggle to afford repairs.

**3. Do you support Good Cause and/ or Rent Control legislation? If not, what do you offer as an alternative?**

I support good cause and rent control legislation. Obviously, rent control legislation is a long way from passing given the current configuration of City Council and will then likely face a protracted legal battle. I would never ask the tens of thousands of struggling renters to take a back seat to landlords - I will always stand with them - and I would initially prioritize low-hanging fruit that improves renters' lives through some of the solutions we have broad agreement around first.

**4. Would you support legislation to enact zoning requirements to compel inclusion of affordable units in market rate developments, with "affordable" defined as no more than 40 % of the average household income in the ward?**

Absolutely! We need a multi-pronged approach to a very complex problem and this would be an important measure that would give our communities the leverage to demand more equitable and sustainable development from the worst profit-driven developers, who are completely unaccountable to the communities they build in.

**5. Would you require the land bank to prioritize the disposition of properties to favor low-income and cooperatively owned developments, including land trusts?**

Absolutely! See answer above. I am also a big supporter of coops and land trusts and want to think creatively with the community about how to expand the support for and capacity of these models to play a key role in community led planning and development that's rooted in a framework of restorative justice.

**B. Education**

**1. The 8th District continues to lose public schools. How can we change that?**

Despite widespread stigmatization, our public schools are doing some great work with children - but too many parents are unaware and opt for home schooling, virtual, charter or private options. The first

step to address declining enrollment is to find out why families are leaving or making other choices in the first place. We could work with Home and School Council to conduct exit interviews and organize community conversations to understand what families are looking for in a school environment and use that information to advocate with the School District. Armed with this information, schools could also showcase and target their successes more effectively.

Beyond marketing approaches - having an elected School Board would give parents, school staff and community groups more influence in the decisions that affect our school district. I will fight for an elected School Board. The closing of Germantown High School and its subsequent sale for pennies on the dollar reflects the worst, most myopic thinking on this topic. Likewise with the conversion of Wister and Pickett to Mastery Charter schools. We should look to the successful efforts of parents and community groups in Nicetown to save Steele School for lessons on how to fight back and keep our district schools.

## **2. What do you think of legislation to regulate charter schools? How would you regulate them?**

As if our public school system didn't have enough challenges, the charter school movement has placed already underfunded schools in competition with each other for scarce resources, creating a two-tiered system of publicly funded schools within the city and serving to undo what little progress we made desegregating schools since the 1960's. Corruption and financial malfeasance has been rampant in the charter world due to a lack of strong oversight and accountability. Charter law must mandate full transparency of all financial, academic AND organizational information - including real estate companies, management groups, consultants, law firms, non-profits and CDC's who profit from unscrupulous, incestuous financial relationships in which charters become landlord and tenant. Another needed revision of charter law would allow districts to cap a charter's administrative costs. Twelve charter CEO's make more than \$200,000/year, two make more than our Superintendent - who manages over 200 schools! This is an insane duplication of resources that robs children of needed resources in the classroom. I agree with the critiques of Lisa Haver and the Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools - the State and district must work together to hold charter school operators to higher standards and close them down when they don't meet them.

## **3. How would you increase community participation in School Board appointments?**

To begin with, we must hold the School Board accountable to create real opportunities for community dialogue - that means genuinely involving the community from the beginning of important decisions and not merely bringing them in to seek approval once a decision has been made. Toward this end, the timing and accessibility of meetings is important. We must remove the obstacles for poor and working class communities to attend and participate. Similarly, the School Board must take specific measures to ensure that marginalized and historically oppressed groups feel welcome to give input. Not everyone is a policy expert, but people's lived experiences should be valued equally. Community groups and coalition partners could also work closely with the Home and School Council to popularize important meetings and organize community turnout. As a City Council representative for District 8, I will create a full time Education Policy Organizer on my staff to work with neighborhood schools and members of the community to improve outcomes.

**4. Would you compute the cost/benefit ratio for the School District of all proposed Keystone Opportunity Zones (KOZ) before they're approved by Council?**

Yes. Legislation cannot happen without precision. The idea of passing a bill that has questionable value because it is something that's been done historically means actively ignoring evidence on what the bill does. We have to do cost benefit analyses for all our bills, but especially ones attempting to create jobs and revenue. KOZs appear to not do much of either - or at least take a long time to do either - yet money still pours into these programs.

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**C. Criminal Justice**

**1. How will you reduce gun violence in the 8th district?**

It's going to take a holistic and collaborative approach rooted in public health paradigms. Evidence shows violence interruption, peer support, healthcare responder and other public health systems are all violence reducing approaches. We need as many preventative tools in the toolkit, and to treat violence as the public health issue that it is. We need to address it through proactive community investments driven by data.

**2. How do we orient the police to service instead of enforcement?**

The best way is to narrow the scope of what police are tasked to do. Police are tasked with every emergency response. They are supposed to be the enforcement arm of the government, so it's natural to approach any situation with that mindset. If we narrow the scope of what emergencies police are the sole response to, we can organize healthcare responders, we can also reorient police to their fundamental mission of serving to protect.

**3. What ideas do you have for reintegrating formerly incarcerated citizens?**

We need trade training and job placement programs and comprehensive community-based support systems including housing and healthcare to help returning citizens get back on their feet. Small business grants and targeted government hiring programs can increase job access for people who are formerly incarcerated and finding such jobs is a critical component of reducing recidivism.

**4. How do we keep employers from denying jobs to qualified ex-offenders?**

We can ban the box but we can also engage in concerted outreach and education coupled with strong hiring incentives. People who are formerly incarcerated are good workers and the main barrier to productive social inclusion is arbitrary barriers including workplace stigma. There's no silver bullet but there are a lot of implementable policies that would help.

**D. Environmental Justice**

**1. Would you support construction of an environmentally damaging facility such as a trash to steam plant in the 8th district if it would bring hundreds of jobs?**



We can't sacrifice our future for our present. Those jobs are tied to harming our planet and are not the only pathway to jobs. I would look at environmentally sustainable ways of generating work, because those are the only kinds of jobs that will last. We don't need to have this conversation again in a few years, with our planet in a worse situation. We need good, sustainable jobs now.

**2. What will you do to support and promote the use of solar and other renewable energy sources in the 8th District?**

Targeted incentives for neighborhoods that have seen, historically, divestment and environmental harm. We have to work with renewable companies, incentivize green renovations through grants, and renovate and retrofit our public buildings to maintain solar and renewable energy sources so that our community gets to carbon neutral ASAP.

**E. Economic Development**

**1. What do you think of imposing an impact fee on businesses failing to pay workers \$15/hr to reimburse the City for the costs of relieving poverty?**

I support the idea of an impact fee as the stick to a carrot. We should also look at using the city business tax to incentivize hiring at \$20/hr with added incentives for hiring returning citizens. If we're going to build an economy that works for everyone we need a way to reward good employers and punish bad ones.

**2. Would you fund the Philadelphia Public Financing Authority that was created by Council to lay the groundwork for a City Public Bank?**

Absolutely. Unlike large private banks that serve the interests of private shareholders and out-of-state owners, Public Banks help municipalities keep capital local by investing in community enterprises and public projects - aimed at the long term economic health of the communities they serve. Public Banks are a key part of a strategy to reverse generations of community disinvestment, especially in poor and working class Black and brown neighborhoods.

**3. What do you think of legislation to bar or limit privatization of City property and assets, such as the PGW?**

I would oppose all forms of privatization of City property and assets including PGW - and support any legislation that seeks to block or bar the sale of publicly owned resources. Furthermore, I would support efforts to expand public ownership in key areas where the market has failed to provide for the needs of the people - including public works jobs, housing, healthcare and finance. I would also support the legal sale of marijuana through expanding the public infrastructure that already exists for the sale of liquor and alcohol. Public ownership of marijuana revenue could transform our economy and bring money into our state and city budgets that could be earmarked to help rebuild the Black and brown communities torn apart by mass incarceration and the war on drugs.

**4. The Board of the PIDC, the City's main economic development funding agency, is made up of members appointed by the Chamber of Commerce. Would you change that?**

I need to learn more about this, but generally speaking the Chamber of Commerce is on the side of capital, not working people. A huge priority of my tenure on City Council will be pushing for community led planning and development - that acts to repair and restore communities from the harm imposed on them from generations - if not centuries - of racist and anti-working class development policies and practices, of which the Chamber of Commerce was complicit. To the extent that Council has power to change how the PIDC is configured, I would fight for representation from the communities most harmed by past practices to comprise the development funding agency.

**5. Would you require the City to withdraw subsidies from large corporations that fail to provide jobs or other benefits to City residents?**

Absolutely, and I would fight to require that any large corporation (definition TBD) that receives subsidies pay a minimum wage of \$20/hr and agree to union card check neutrality as a condition of receipt of said subsidy. Combined with a City Business Tax that incentivizes paying higher wages, an Impact Fee for employers who pay poverty wages and a City Wealth Tax on stocks and bonds we'd be on our way to creating some economic justice.

**F. Taxes**

**1. Which taxes would you propose raising to fund programs that cannot be paid for under the existing tax structure?**

In addition to the ones mentioned above, I would look at the creation of a City Reparations Tax targeted at the banks, institutions and corporations that profited, not only from slavery, but also from centuries of racist and discriminatory practices in employment and housing that have robbed Black Philadelphians of untold billions in generational wealth. I would work with leaders in the Black community to decide how to invest that revenue to repair the incredible damage done.

**2. What do you think of allowing a cap to be set on the number of property tax abatements granted in the 8th District?**

Yes. I would be in favor of eliminating the tax abatement altogether. The abatements rob our schools of the resources they need while contributing to displacement by fueling the most harmful effects of gentrification and forcing existing property owners to make up the tax difference.

**V. GENERAL STATEMENT**

Use this space to provide any further information that you would like us to consider about your candidacy, not covered by the questions above.

**On the crisis of violent crime:**

I believe the root cause of violence in Philadelphia is the structural violence that so many face every day. Poverty is structural violence. Racism is structural violence. Patriarchy is structural violence. Lack of secure, truly affordable housing is structural violence. Lack of healthcare, including mental healthcare, is structural violence. A punitive, police state aimed at criminalizing Black bodies is structural violence. We know that rates of violence are higher when communities don't have the vital resources they need to thrive. And we

know that too many neighborhoods across the city have either never had the resources they needed, or have seen massive disinvestment over the last 40 years including capitalist globalization that resulted in more than 400,000 good paying industrial jobs leaving the city

Some policies that I would support to reduce violence include:

1. A public works jobs bill for Philadelphia, including jobs for youth. Put people back to work in union jobs at living wages rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure and beautifying our communities. If capitalism can't create jobs, we must look to city, state and federal governments to create an economy that works for everyone and gives everyone a chance to work. (Penn Medicine Research found that fixing up abandoned homes reduces gun assaults by 13%; another study found around a quarter reduction in violence in neighborhoods that received renovation grants).
2. Triple funding for public housing to reduce homelessness and help provide housing stability.
3. Create Healthcare Responder Corps - teams of social workers and mental health workers who are trained to help people having a mental health crisis - instead of cops who are trained to see everyone as a threat.
4. Create Integrated Service Facilities that provide housing support services, safe respite homelessness mitigation programs, substance use treatment programs, overdose prevention and Safe Consumption services and legal support clinics
5. Create Community Safety Centers that house family supports, violence prevention services, community mediation centers, community based alternatives to incarceration, racism response funds and non-police crisis intervention teams trained in de-escalation and non-violent response.
6. Hire and train crisis de-escalators who are equipped with the tools to intervene in domestic disturbance calls.