



Connect with your Neighbors.....Change the World

# 2023 Council At-Large Questionnaire

Prepared by: **Nina Ahmad**

Email: **nina@ninaforphilly.com**

Campaign Manager/Coordinator:   Bilal Rice   Phone/Email: 908-294-1632

Committee Name: Nina for Philly

Campaign Address: P.O. Box 27339 Philadelphia, PA 19118

Campaign Email: info@ninaforphilly.com Website; ninaforphillycom

## CANDIDATE CERTIFICATION

Candidate Name Nina Ahmad

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: *Nina Ahmad*

Date: January 12, 2023

**Please complete, sign and return this form via email in Word format to: [info@phillynn.org](mailto:info@phillynn.org) and Gloria Gilman [gmgilman@gmail.com](mailto:gmgilman@gmail.com). Also mail a copy with the signature page to**

**Gloria Gilman  
121 S. Broad St., Suite 1710  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
By 5 PM January 12, 2023**

### I. INTRODUCTION

Although many of the questions in Section III below call for a simple yes or no answer, please feel free to provide an explanation for any of your choices. If you have not yet come to a final decision, or don't currently have enough information to provide an informed answer, please so state.

### II. BACKGROUND

1. What, if any, elected or appointed government office(s) have you held?
  1. Committee Member (2nd Division, Ward 9), Philadelphia Democratic Party (2010-2016; 2022-present)
  2. Deputy Mayor for Public Engagement, City of Philadelphia, Jan 2016-Nov 2017: This was a new Cabinet Level position reporting to Mayor Jim Kenney; first Asian American to be appointed to any Philadelphia Mayoral Administration.

3. State Committee member of the Pennsylvania Democratic State Committee representing the 4th Senatorial District (May 2022 for a 4-year term). I established their first Asian American Pacific Islander Caucus and was elected the chair for the caucus.
  4. Commissioner on the Asian American and Pacific Islander Presidential Advisory Commission (May 2014 -December 2016): Appointed by President Obama.
  5. Chair, Philadelphia Commission on Asian American Affairs (2009-2015): appointed by Mayor Nutter to lead the newly reconstructed Commission.
2. With respect to your other qualifications for the office of At-Large Council member:
- a. What community or 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.)
    - **State Senator Art Haywood** and I in my capacity as a representative for the National Organization for Women worked on issues concerning sexual harassment in the Pennsylvania General Assembly, particularly concerning allegations brought against the then State Senator Daylin Leach. Additionally, I worked with Senator Haywood on economic justice issues and participated in his roundtables as well as his community engagement events that he sponsored.
    - **Vanessa Fields**, currently the President of the Philadelphia Chapter of the National Organization for Women and President of AFSCME District Council 47's Retiree Chapter. In the past year we have been mobilizing responses to the sexual assaults that have been taking place on SEPTA busses, trains and on surrounding property. These efforts are still ongoing as we have worked across county lines to bring stakeholders to the table including Josh Shapiro and the Office of the Attorney General.
    - **Zarina Lomax**, founder of The Apologues (<https://www.34st.com/article/2022/01/gun-violence-philly-trauma-heal-community-city>) and I as the head of the Pennsylvania chapter of the National Organization for Women, organized and hosted two GOTV events for the past November general election to engage marginalized communities, using art as a tool to engage and celebrate women's roles in the political process. The events were "Portraits of Power: Mobilizing the Vote" held at Taller Puertorriqueño – El Corazón Cultural del Barrio (The Cultural Heart of Latina/Latino/LatinX Philadelphia) and "Painting Our Path to the Polls, a live interactive mural event" held at the Crane Chinatown Community Center.
  - c. What other endorsements have you received?

While I just announced on Dec 1, 2022, I am in the process of applying for and requesting endorsements.

1. AFSCME District Council 33, Philadelphia's largest blue-collar municipal union.
2. South Asians for America, a national, grassroots organization began their 2023 Candidate Endorsement Cycle by announcing their endorsement of Nina Ahmad, Candidate for Philadelphia City Council At Large on January 7, 2023.
3. Ryan Boyer, Business Manager of the Philadelphia Building and Construction Trades Council, indicated his strong support sending a message to organized labor in the City by stating. *"Nina is an inspiring leader and a true champion for the underdogs of our city. I know she'll throw her heart – as she always does – into finding innovative solutions to Philadelphia's biggest problems."* ([https://www.phillytrib.com/news/local\\_news/nina-ahmad-womens-advocate-and-entrepreneur-seeks-open-council-seat/article\\_d3228a7a-1438-56a7-a64e-fcf58220691c.html](https://www.phillytrib.com/news/local_news/nina-ahmad-womens-advocate-and-entrepreneur-seeks-open-council-seat/article_d3228a7a-1438-56a7-a64e-fcf58220691c.html))

d. How do you plan to win?

I am a proven vote-getter and plan to re-mobilize the cross-racial, labor and progressive coalition that enabled me to win the statewide Democratic nomination for Auditor General in 2020 that garnered almost 200,000 votes from Philadelphia voters in the six-way primary and over 550,000 votes from Philadelphians in the general election. In May 2022, I received the most votes in the 4th Senate District as a State Committee member to the PA Democratic State Committee.

e. How much money have you raised?      How much do you expect to raise?

Since fundraising began on Dec 10, 2022, we have raised close to \$50,000 from individual donors and expect to raise \$500K.

3. What three things would you most want to accomplish if elected?

I am an intersectional feminist. As the current President of the PA chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and as past President of Philly NOW, I wholeheartedly embrace NOW's six core missions of Economic Justice, Reproductive Justice, Gender Equality, Combatting Racism, Ending Violence Against Women and Constitutional Equality. These missions are the lens through which I will evaluate and initiate any public policy that I promote as an At-Large City Council Member.

I'm running to make Philadelphia a healthier, stronger city. All of our challenges are, at their root, health challenges and demand a public health approach. From crime and gun violence to housing and the environment, if we make Philadelphia a healthier city, we can make it a stronger, safer city. As a biomedical scientist, I've spent my life taking on these kinds of challenges and I've used science and data to find new solutions to old problems. That's my agenda for Philadelphia: A healthier city for a stronger future."

- Recognize gun violence for what it is: a public health epidemic: A public health approach to prevent gun violence is a population level approach that addresses both firearm access and the factors that contribute to and protect from gun violence.
- Make Philadelphia the Healthiest Big City: As a health care leader since our country's founding, there's no reason Philadelphia shouldn't be a national model for community and mental health.
- Put the Environment Front and Center: Making Philadelphia a cleaner, greener city will have positive impact on the overall health and strength of our neighborhoods.

### III. ISSUES

#### A. Economic Development

**What do you see as the current economic picture of Philadelphia and what would you do to make economic development more just, fair, and equitable for all Philadelphians?**

Would you back legislation to:

1. Impose an impact fee on businesses failing to pay workers \$15/hr to reimburse the City for the costs of relieving poverty?

Yes. And \$15/hr may already be too low.

2. Take \$200 million of City pension funds now invested in risky securities to invest in neighborhood economic development projects, through a public bank or otherwise?

Yes. Reinvesting City pension funds locally keeps dollars within the community and thus supports greater local economic growth.

3. Create a program to provide technical assistance and start-up funding for cooperative, worker-owned businesses and housing?

Yes. This is an old legislative idea that needs new life. Coops and worker-owned and operated businesses and housing provide more stability than other forms of ownership and provide greater control in protecting their collective interests.

4. Take whatever steps are needed to create and fund a Bank of Philadelphia to hold all City deposits and invest them locally?

Yes, absolutely. And any new Mayor must implement the bill that was already passed by City Council.

5. Create a system of participatory budgeting that would allow City residents to control allocation of all or a portion of the funds allocated in the City budget?

Yes, if it is legal to do so. My approach has always been to engage and consult with closest to the issue and those directly impacted.

## **B. Education**

### **What are the root causes for the current state of Philadelphia Public Schools and what would you do to address these issues?**

In general, the lack of implementation of the full funding formula legislated by our General Assembly has continued to institutionalize the financial inequities between the rich and poor districts.

Specifically, would you back legislation to:

1. Regulate charter schools by making their budgetary practices transparent, ridding them of conflicts of interest, and stopping them from cherry-picking their student bodies? Would you be willing to attach that plan to a budget rider?

Yes.

Under the guise of financial recovery, charter schools should not be a large-scale strategy to address public education. Such a strategy is, in my opinion, a veiled attempt to dismantle teachers' unions who serve our communities and educate our children in the public school system. As a candidate who in past elections received endorsements from AFSCME District Councils 33, 47 and 1199C, the Philadelphia AFL-CIO Council, as well as numerous other labor organizations, I will not support any effort to undercut unionized workers, who form the bedrock of our public education system. Additionally, there is lack of transparency regarding the myriad of opaque financial practices across charter school management companies and the ownership of facilities within which these schools operate, which often lead to increased

disparities across students, irregularities in the accumulation of additional public (publicly obligated) debt, and inequities and irregularities in the ownership and distribution of what were formerly considered public assets—from buildings and vehicles right down to desks, chairs, and computers.

2. Make the School Board an elective office, or otherwise deepen community participation in School Board appointments?

State legislation would be needed to allow for an elected School Board in Philadelphia, but I would support a non-partisan election if it was also coupled with publicly financed campaigns.

3. Compute the cost/benefit ratio for the School District of all proposed KOZ zones before they're approved by Council?

Yes. This a bare minimum. KOZ zones should not be exempted from taxes unless there is a clear cost/benefit analysis that would enhance conditions for the neighborhood in which it was planned.

4. Increase direct City funding for the School District? If so, please explain.

Yes. Beyond the legislatively authorized property tax rate, I would advocate for additional targeted and direct funding to the schools.

### **C. Criminal Justice**

#### **What do you see as the current state of the Criminal Justice System in Philadelphia and what would you do to address any perceived problems/issues?**

In general, our criminal justice system is chaotic with the major departments not working together. The blame game is not an effective approach to promoting coordinated responses. I am already in touch with leading national organizations, such as the Center For Court Innovation, to explore best practices that promote restorative justice.

Would you back legislation to:

1. Fully end the stop and frisk program?

Absolutely yes. This practice is racist and traumatizes too many black and brown men. This is not an appropriate way to deescalate potentially volatile situations.

2. Change the Charter to create an oversight board to keep a check on Philadelphia prison conditions?

Yes.

3. Increase post-release counseling for jobs, housing and other support services?

Yes. This is a critical tool to prevent recidivism.

4. Bar employers from denying jobs to ex-offenders without a specific job-related basis?

Yes. This would be an expansion of the ban-the-box legislation.

### **D. The Role of Community in the Economic and Political Systems in Philly**

**What do you see as the role of the community in our political and economic systems and what would you do to make it more fair, just, and equitable for all Philadelphians?**

Would you back legislation to:

1. Bar or limit privatization of City property and work done by City employees? More specifically are there any circumstances under which you would sell PGW?

I would oppose the sale of PGW.

2. Move Pension Fund investment decisions in-house?

As much as possible, pension fund investment decisions should not be contracted out. All pension regulation and policy are within City Council's power and as such, this could be legislated.

3. Reform PIDC, the City's main economic development funding agency, so that its Board has a majority of public and community members, rather than Chamber of Commerce appointed members?

Yes. I would want to see more members who actually live in the City as well as people and small businesses from proposed areas for development.

4. Require the City to withdraw subsidies from corporations that fail to provide jobs or other benefits to City residents?

Yes. This should be written into legislation, incorporated into all transaction documents in all City subsidies no matter how long or short the duration.

5. Publicly finance City elections?

Yes. There was legislation years ago, sponsored when Angel Ortiz was in Council but it did not pass although there were extensive hearings. In January 2022, former Councilmember Derek Green introduced an ethics and election reform package which included public financing of campaigns. This is extremely difficult to get passed without a very strong citizen support and movement, as sitting officeholders do not want to make it easier for challengers.

## **E. Housing**

**What are the root causes of the current Housing Crisis in Philadelphia and how would you address these issues?**

Would you back legislation to:

1. Create a rent stabilization program?

Yes. As long as worker pay does not keep pace with inflation, we should have a means to prevent displacement. But the extent and longevity of such a policy needs to be data-driven and also balanced to consider the needs of "mom and pop" single property landlords.

2. End, limit or curtail Councilmanic prerogative over land disposition?

Easier said than done. Since this is a long-held but unwritten practice, and any change and shift in such a practice will require the engagement of residents and district council members. I am open to suggestions on strategy.

3. Create or support more affordable housing, both rental and home ownership? Please specify.

Yes. I would advocate for permanent and increased funding for the Housing Trust Fund which would be targeted to low-income families. I am also in support of the recently passed Turn The Key” program which will help facilitate the sale of 1,000 new, energy-efficient, 3 bedroom, 1½ bath homes on publicly-owned city land.

4. What would you do to curtail or limit the effects of gentrification in our neighborhoods that is displacing long term and low-income residents?

Require that any new development retain the architectural integrity of the neighborhood, be energy efficient and/or with a zero-carbon footprint and hire local residents for projects. The creation of strong Community Benefits Agreements which give real power to community members is also important. And finally, the limitation of the 10-year property tax abatement to only those areas where there is a demonstrated need for development, and not just areas where developers are only concerned about maximizing profits. This last policy has been enabled by state legislation crafted by Representative Jared Solomon with a local bill proposed by Council President Clarke to cover parts of his district and the 8<sup>th</sup> Council District.

## **F. Environmental Justice**

### **What are the major Environmental issues in Philadelphia and what would you do to address them?**

As an elected official in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania I will be constitutionally mandated to protect our environment. Article 1, section 27 that requires that all public officials act as stewards for our natural resources and I will take that obligation seriously and proactively advocate for clean air, water and land in our public lands and spaces. Environmentally negligent and irresponsible policies disproportionately harm our black and brown residents; it is called environmental racism and it must stop. As one who looks at public policy intersectionally and wholistically, I will assure that environmental protection be on an equal footing with other justice issues.

Please answer the following specific questions:

1. Would you use the City’s power of the purse to prevent SEPTA from continuing to build and use natural-gas fueled power plants in the City?

Yes, particularly if such gas is being supplied from fracked sources.

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

Environmentally sustainable and renewable energy development are good economic strategies for creating a healthier and thriving city. In addition to advocating for its use in city contracts and all city economic benefits, that the issue be viewed as the health issue that it is. Scientific data must be raised up to show that the continued use of non-renewable resources is a threat to everyone’s health and welfare, two areas where City Council Members are authorized to protect.

3. Do you support a plan for City government or the entire City to be fossil-free by a particular date? If so, how would you accomplish that goal?

On January 15, 2021 Mayor Kenney announced the City of Philadelphia’s commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. In 2022, environmental groups declared some progress. But we must do better. It is clear that scientists around the world have provided credible evidence that we have just ten years to lessen our CO<sup>2</sup>

emissions to prevent the most dire consequences of climate change. With that information in mind, I would advocate City as well as state resources to help us become fossil-free as soon as possible and the use of resources from a Public Bank could help accomplish this. Additionally, the City Council should be looking to amend the Pension Ordinance to make sure that it is not investing in the fossil fuel industry.

## **G. Health Care**

**What can the City do to provide and support adequate and affordable health care for its residents?**

. **Expand access to primary healthcare**, complete plans to expand District 10 Health Center and add needed resources to other centers across the city.

Specially answer the following question:

1. Would you support the construction of a City-owned Northeast Health Center?

Equity, inclusion and access are key components to the provision of adequate and affordable healthcare. Philadelphia Health Centers are an essential part of needed primary care but of Philadelphia's nine health centers only one is located in the Northeast section of the City. Not surprisingly studies have shown that the Northeast is sorely underserved in comparison to other neighborhoods and communities. The previous Health Commissioner's decision to locate a new health center on the campus of Friends Hospital did not exemplify the core values embodied in equity, inclusion and access. Thankfully, perhaps in part to pressure from Councilwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez, the current Health Commissioner is reconsidering the location choice and is looking to put the new center in the Frankford section of the Northeast. I support this shift in position, because it is critical to provide healthcare in areas that are more easily accessible to the most underserved populations, in this case primarily people of color.

## **H. Taxes**

**Would is your plan for a fair, just and equitable taxing structure for the City of Philadelphia, addressing specifically your position on real estate, corporate, and individual taxing rates?**

Tax justice in the form of a true progressive taxation system, will have to be done at the state level by eliminating, through Constitutional amendment, the uniformity clause, which requires the same rate of tax for all people. This has become a real hardship for the poor and anyone on a fixed income. The City Council can actually help alleviate this inequity even under the current system, by providing a tax exemption (similar to what the state has done for years) of the first \$25,000 of city wage income.

Specifically answer the following:

### **PILOTS**

1. Would you increase taxes if the programs you wish to fund cannot otherwise be paid for?

Yes. But the City has just realized over \$500 million of surplus. However, should that eventuality occur and even if it did not, all entities and people with means should pay their fair share. That is why I would advocate for Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILOTS) for the largest non-profits in our City who are currently exempt from property taxes.

2. Which taxes would you propose raising?

I would eliminate the 10 year property tax abatement in those parts of the City that no longer need it to stimulate development. I would only keep it those areas that need affordable housing. This has been recently enabled by state legislation developed by Representative Jared Solomon in his Affordable Housing Unit Tax Exemption Act.

## **I. 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.

My lived experience as a brown woman, immigrating to the US from the war-torn country of Bangladesh and my ongoing commitment to progressive issues, civic engagement and activism, are a critical lens that informs and will continue to guide my political leadership. Diversity, inclusion and equity are not just the right thing to do, but something that benefits all of society.