

Sheila Dixon Answers to Housing, Trans. And Fair Dev. Forum Questions

Note: Ms. Dixon provided written answers prior to a revision to question 1 that added homelessness to the question.

Housing, Transportation and Fair Development Mayoral Forum May 19 from 6:00pm to 8:00pm Questions

Candidates must respond in writing on or before May 15 to all 10 questions. Please submit responses to Matt Hill, hillm@publicjustice.org. Responses will be posted on the web the day of the forum on May 19. Candidates will be asked for a verbal response to at least the first 6 questions at the forum. Candidate surrogates are not allowed to substitute for the candidate at the forum. Details about participation in the virtual forum on the webex platform will be provided shortly.

QUESTIONS

1. The COVID-19 crisis threatens tens of thousands of Baltimore City households with eviction, foreclosure, and additional stress on our transportation network. What specific measures would you take to help City residents avoid eviction, foreclosure and additional deterioration of our transportation infrastructure?

While the challenges we face today are unprecedented, it's important to learn from the lessons from past crises. As mayor during the 2008 Great Recession, I know what it takes to lead our city through an economic crisis. Many will recall the stimulus bill passed through the leadership of President Obama, which made millions available to cities and states to fund programs and meet the immediate needs of our citizens for food, housing and healthcare. The 2008 stimulus also made bold investments in communities to rebuild roads and bridges, make buildings more energy efficient, build affordable housing, and train Americans for the new green economy.

As mayor, my team took aggressive action to capture and maximize stimulus funding by creating the Baltimore Economic Recovery Team. Representatives from the mayor's office and more than a dozen city agencies came together every week to strategize on federal grant opportunities, make decisions on spending funds equitably across the city, and ensure that every dollar was spent wisely. When state and federal agencies put out their call for grant-funded projects, every city agency was ready to apply. Through our efforts, Baltimore City received \$4,221 per capita in stimulus spending while the average jurisdiction around the country received only \$1,222. I am ready on Day One to oversee the kind of top-down operation it will take to see Baltimore through this crisis.

The last two months have made it clear how important transit is to Baltimore – people in essential jobs at hospitals and nursing homes and warehouses that ship packages rely on a workforce needs public transit. If MTA had shut down like they tried to in the beginning of the pandemic, our whole health care system would have been turned upside down. I would like to send a thank you to Sam Jordan and the Baltimore Transit Equity Coalition for standing up for

transit riders and fighting to keep the buses running. Also, thank you the bus drivers, the mechanics and the subway and light rail operators who kept transit running for those who need it the most.

2. Fair Development centers our fundamental needs for housing, health care, work with dignity, education and a sustainable environment, in government housing and economic development policies, thereby advancing dignity for all Baltimore residents. Will your administration advance fair development in environmental policies? If so, will those policies include ending the city's contract with the BRESKO incinerator and fully implementing a Zero Waste plan that will address toxic pollution and waste in the City and how?

Elimination of the BRESKO emissions will help many communities. The emissions from transportation is also a significant contributor. I will revive and continue the expansion of the infrastructure for electric vehicles. It is economically attractive to convert part of the city fleet to electricity. I will work with other large fleet owners to see what the city can do to help encourage a transition.

With new pollution sources impacting neighborhoods, we should address the air pollution through the permitting process and use the best controls and look to offset as a last resort.

As Mayor, I created an energy office that accomplished much in the low-income communities enabling non-profits to expand programs serving the neighborhoods. The office has installed 14 MW of renewable energy generation. The next step is to create an energy authority to produce power from clean energy generation for the low-income communities. The cost would be competitive and saving costs to the low-income families over time.

3. The official count of vacant properties in Baltimore is 16,000. If elected Mayor, will you commit to using the funding and policy tools at your disposal to (a) convert at least 500 more properties a year from vacancy to occupancy, while prioritizing the needs of community residents living in neighborhoods with vacant structures, and (b) support estate planning for elderly residents to reduce the number of properties becoming vacant?

We will work with all stakeholders to construct a "Land Bank" that speeds up the process of converting unwanted abandoned properties to more productive uses, better maintains properties, accelerates demolition where appropriate, raises outside money, and promotes affordable housing and expands green space. We must also establish a relationship between the Land Bank and a Community Land Trust (CLT). The Land Bank will pilot a relationship with a community land trust (CLT). The CLT builds and sells housing to low- and moderate-income homeowners but retains the underlying deed to preserve affordability. CLT is one of many strategies that we will use to create permanently affordable housing. CLTs are particularly effective in communities facing gentrification. A CLT retains ownership of the land while the homeowner retains ownership of the home. CLTs may place resale restrictions on a home to ensure long-term affordability while enabling the homeowner to maintain equity.

4. Baltimore City faces a wave of likely eviction actions due to COVID-19, and it is far from ready. Yet, evictions were already a crisis prior to COVID. Approximately 140,000 eviction cases are filed and almost 6,500 families are evicted each year with many becoming homeless. These evictions have a disparate impact on Black households and female-headed households and reinforce segregation. Baltimore Renters United is releasing a report stating that by investing \$5.7 million each year in a right to counsel in evictions, the City and State would realize \$35.6 million in benefits and costs avoided. How will you address evictions and will your plan include a right to counsel in eviction cases?

As we know, COVID-19 will have vast economic effects on not only our economy, but our way of life as well move forward. Unfortunately, evictions may be a byproduct of that if we don't take the initiative to lead as a city. My plan for COVID-19 recovery takes a holistic approach to preserving and restoring jobs and protecting wages. On my first day back in office, I will re-establish the Baltimore Economic Recovery Team and charge them with bringing together the best ideas for putting Baltimore back to work. We need all our brightest minds working together in unison to serve our city in its hour of need. Specifically for evictions, I do support the right to counsel, and work on plans for deferred payments, payment plans, and best practices for rent relief.

As mayor, I will use major lessons we learned from the 2008 Recovery Act as a guide. First, we had to be ready with projects and programs that could move quickly. Second, for every dollar we won from the federal government, there were community, business and philanthropic partners willing to match the investments with money and "sweat equity." Some projects could only succeed with 100% public funds, but the most successful projects were those that leveraged resources from across community, non-profit and private sectors. These are the kinds of projects we can build on and adapt to the times in order to bring back our economy as quickly as possible.

5. In 2018, the City made a historic agreement with the Fair Development Roundtable and Community Development Network to fund the Affordable Housing Trust Fund at \$20 million/year. Yet, the revenue actually coming into the fund is far less than promised, and the proposed FY 2021 capital budget for DHCD is almost 40% lower than last year. Would your administration meet the City's obligation to fund the Affordable Housing Trust Fund with at least \$20 million/year without cutting other affordable housing funds and how? What other policies would you promote to support the development of affordable housing as well as ending homelessness?

Homelessness is something I take very seriously which is why in 2008 my administration instituted the "Journey Home" Plan. It was a comprehensive plan to address the various issues that impact Baltimore's ability to end homelessness. There's a Mahatma Gandhi quote I often think of when I discuss empowering our most vulnerable: "The best test of a civilized society is the way in which it treats its most vulnerable and weakest members." I've visited many homeless shelters back then and I still visit them now. I've met parents who were simply down on their luck due to the loss of a job or enormous medical bills. I've met other who are living with mental health challenges. Homelessness is as much the consequence of undiagnosed or

untreated mental health as it is of the lack of affordable housing. That said, however, increasing access to affordable housing is a top priority for my administration. We have real opportunities to rebuild and revitalize our neighborhoods by making constructive use of the abandoned houses, dilapidated buildings, and vacant lots that have increased at rapid rates in recent years.

Abandoned properties cost all of us money – depleting the property values of adjacent and nearby homeowners, absorbing an unfair share of City taxpayer funded services and reducing safety and quality of life in affected neighborhoods. According to a study by Temple University of vacant properties in Philadelphia, abandoned housing on a block can reduce the value of all other properties by an average of \$6,720. Among other things, the reduced value prevents other homeowners from building wealth. More directly, a city's failure to collect even a small percentage of delinquent property taxes due to abandonment can result in billions of lost revenues. The city's Vacant to Values program has made it possible for developers to assemble vacant public and private property for development in neighborhoods with underlying market strength, but the program is not structured to change the physical landscape in our poorest and most disinvested neighborhoods and cannot substitute for a neighborhood revitalization strategy. Moreover, there are many instances where the funds spent for demolition would be better spent of renovation of the properties. We must find a way to assist current owners who desire to improve their properties.

6. Light rail has emerged as the most robust generator of economic development across the nation over the last four decades. Seattle, Portland, Los Angeles, Denver, Charlotte, Dallas are excellent examples. How would you direct and encourage Baltimore City and regional housing and development planners to support the completion of the Red Line light rail project in order to achieve improved transit equity, reduced commute times, preservation of affordable housing, and the transformative community economic growth that follows transportation systems anchored by light rail?

I support the completion of the Red Line. My Administration put a lot of time and energy keeping that project on track. We stepped up and sure that the Red Line kept moving forward even when it was controversial in my own neighborhood. The project was not perfect. But it was an investment that would have created thousands of good paying construction jobs, would have sparked revitalization in West Baltimore and helped to ease congestion in southeast and downtown. We can't just sit back and hope that maybe a new Governor will bring it back in 2 or 4 years. We have to be clear that Baltimore is going to be a partner in making it happen. That may mean that we have to look at some of our current transportation funds as a way to help pay for it, or that we have to pay for some of the project expenses directly like relocating utilities or providing the land. No one is going to hand us the project – we have to be aggressive in fighting for it.

7. In the transportation industry, "Development Follows Rail" is a proven mantra. Accordingly, not one community economic development project is associated with the bus-focused Baltimore Link system. Banks don't invest in bus stops. How would you re-direct or incentivize local and regional housing and development planners to pair transportation and land use in a long-needed, comprehensive development vision for Baltimore that includes emergency measures to provide permanently affordable housing?

I think the issue areas of economic development, access to jobs, affordable housing, etc are most definitely linked together. For too long, transit in the region has been considered a “City issue” with small pockets of support in suburban communities. This has translated into too little support for transit in Annapolis by legislators from the region. More recently, I have been encouraged to hear some legislators from Baltimore and Anne Arundel Counties expressing their interest in and support for transit – but those instances have been too little, too late.

There is a regional coalition to be built around transit when one considers the impact of the MARC system and commuter buses on residents of Howard, Baltimore and Anne Arundel Counties. This relies on the support of suburban business communities such as the BWI Business District and Hunt Valley relying on “reverse commuters” along the light rail line, and supporters of expanding MARC service in eastern Baltimore County and Harford County. I am prepared to forge this regional coalition through leadership at the Baltimore Metropolitan Council and Baltimore Regional Transportation Board, although these venues have historically proven less than effective in advancing meaningful transportation policy.

City government needs to understand better the concerns of residents regarding “B-Link.” I will not “pass the buck” by sending City residents directly to MTA to address bus route and stop changes. Instead, my Administration will use any leverage we have to make “B-Link” work for Baltimore. My Administration will be very willing to partner with MTA to make improvements to traffic signal timing and bus stop management called for in the B-Link plan, but only if MTA treats the City like a partner and does not impose a system on us without meaningful input.

My priority is to maintain and strengthen the Circulator in the context of its initial vision. Specifically, my goal is to restore 10-minute headways and ensure that service quality meets the high standard we set when service began. Anything less is not acceptable, as the Circulator was supposed to demonstrate everything that can be right about public transit. Likewise, we should maintain the Harbor Connector basically in its present form – serving quick, cross-harbor trips. Approximately 85% of the City’s parking tax revenue is generated within the original service area of the Circulator (roughly from MLK Blvd to Central Avenue and from North Avenue to Key Highway). The business and tourism community – and even some parking operators – came together to support a restructuring of and modest increase to the parking tax to provide a stable, ongoing source of revenue for the Circulator. We knew when conceiving the Circulator that the parking tax would never secure 100% of the Circulator budget, but believed that meeting approximately 70% with parking tax revenues would be a solid financial basis upon which to build. Moving forward, to stabilize and maintain the Circulator, we should move to close gradually the “free parking” loophole where the cost of parking spaces is built into office and residential leases and no parking taxes are paid.

8. Fair Development also demands that the City redress the harms of racism and predatory capitalism in the City’s non-participatory budgeting process, the lack of access to capital among Black households and businesses, and the long history of exploitation in the workplace. Will you advance fair development in budgeting, banking, and the workplace? If so, will those policies include A) implementing a participatory and/or legislative budgeting process, B) prioritizing worker co-ops in City contracts, and C) conducting a feasibility study of a public bank in Baltimore City?

I agree with all of the methods mentioned. Over the past ten years, I have been working with minority and women owned businesses to advise them on expansion and development. My current economic prosperity plan outlines some aggressive plans to support black and minority owned businesses as they have been systematically disinvested in throughout the story of our city. Businesses that employ the greatest number of local residents are most vital to their communities. It is undeniable that in Baltimore unemployment is painfully evident in certain areas in the black community. True economic development in those areas can only be achieved by providing better paying jobs to the people that live there. While they are not the largest employers based on the total number of employees, evidence shows that the employment of residents from distressed neighborhoods is proportionately highest in the workforces of black and other minority businesses. It is those businesses that must be strengthened if those distressed communities are to achieve economic parity. Baltimore is majority African American, and that means if we are to turn the tide of poverty and hopelessness – we must take care of our minority-owned businesses that play a critical role in transforming our city's future. Also, I fully stand in support of workers' rights and using tools such as PLA's and enforcing livable wages to fortify the protection of our workers.

9. Baltimore renters are often forced to live in substandard rental housing with mold infestation being one of the more dangerous and unaddressed issues. Some cities like Washington D.C., are exploring comprehensive mold regulations. Other jurisdictions have more rigorous rental licensing laws that do not allow the landlord to choose and hire the inspector charged with inspecting the property before the landlord can get a license. How would you address the serious threats to life, health and safety in Baltimore's rental housing?

Increasing access to affordable housing is a top priority for my administration. We have real opportunities to rebuild and revitalize our neighborhoods by making constructive use of the abandoned houses, dilapidated buildings, and vacant lots that have increased at rapid rates in recent years. We will institute a land bank where the liens on these properties are cleared by the city. These properties can be redeveloped into affordable housing units and successfully reintegrated into our communities.

Upholding the rental licensing law reinforces the safety and living conditions of our rental properties. The disconnect of landlords not having to present licenses in court is an unfair practice that needs to change. Mandates surrounding the practices of landlords should be assessed closely so that we can hold them accountable for their role in the rising number of evictions.

10. Decades of racial segregation and disinvestment have produced neighborhood and housing conditions that have a negative impact on the physical and mental health of many Baltimore residents every day. The major health institutions in our city can play a more active role in addressing these issues, in partnership with City government and community-based organizations. Please describe how you as mayor will better align health institutions' support for making measurable improvements in City neighborhood and housing conditions?

I have been known to say that our city should be one of the healthiest in the country due to the fact that we have some of the most premium and renowned health institutions in the world right here in Baltimore City. Under coordinated leadership within City Hall, a dedicated staff will work with the leaders of Police, Fire, Health and Emergency Management to strategically focus resources and build partnerships that: Expand the use of hospital emergency departments to counsel and connect trauma victims to services and assistance, using models proven to reduce repeat injuries. There is only one hospital currently providing this critical service. We must take the program's successes to replicate and expand them across the city. Recognize that violence is ultimately a public health issue and requires investment as far upstream as possible. We must emphasize lead poisoning reduction, mental health for children, home visiting for pregnant women and other methods to ensure the health and safety of our city's residents. Structure services for substance use disorders and mental illness. These services provide individuals with volunteer and job opportunities that will help them live independently, work, and contribute to our city. Partner with local businesses to provide job opportunities to at-risk individuals in real time. Plan for Public Coordinate extensive volunteer efforts in our community so that we are constantly engaging those that we know are at risk of committing crimes and/or becoming victims of crime. These volunteers can provide music lessons, drug treatment and health care for longstanding conditions. Success will be measured not by the number of people in the system, but by the results for each individual.