



Star Tribune Editorial Board questions for 2021 Minneapolis mayoral candidates

1. Why are you running to become mayor of Minneapolis and what skills and experience would you bring to the job?

I am running for mayor because for too long we have been given broken promises by a leadership that has failed to uphold their campaign platforms, failed to provide safety, and failed to hold themselves accountable. I want to be the mayor who leads, who brings the city and our communities together. Our city needs a strong mayor who will lead us forward and bring us the change we have been looking for.

We were promised a “Fresh Start” in 2017 - and I believe we cannot move forward and have a new start when failed leadership remains in our Mayor’s office. We all know our government must do better – and there is a long way to go. And that is where my experience and skills as a professional mediator will help us in this important moment in Civil Rights and Public Safety in Minneapolis.

You see, Minneapolis at this moment needs a mediator. Someone who will speak to all communities - whether they agree with them or disagree with them. We need someone who is sensible but not afraid to challenge the other side- and welcomes it, not run away from it. And the next Mayor - with the likely success of the “Question 1 Charter Amendment” for a "Strong Mayor" - needs to be someone who firmly values talking and getting to the root causes, facilitating resolutions, and ultimately bringing the other side to the table so we can do the people's work. The division and rancor in our City Government must end. I'll be the Mayor that the other candidates simply cannot be.

2. In your view, what are the major responsibilities of a mayor and what is the mayor’s role in governing the city?

I believe the Mayor should be the total administrative authority in the city - and this will be a reality if the voters of the city approve Charter Amendment "Question 1" (Executive Mayor-Legislative Council).

I believe it is past time for the Mayor to have the power to act with independence on behalf of all the voters throughout the city that elected them. I believe the mayor must be able to appoint (and dismiss) department heads without council approval (or interference). I believe the Mayor's office must be able to supervise - and truly gets to lead an executive branch - where department heads report to and coordinate city department priorities through the Mayor's office - and not the various personalities and priorities of the City Council and their unelected staff.

I believe the Mayor and their team must continue to prepare and administer a comprehensive city budget - one that serves every part of the city equally and without favor so that EVERY part of the city is an amazing place to live, work, or visit.

And the Mayor must have the capacity to continue to push this Civil Rights moment in our city's history forward - and bring us all together to really begin the racial healing we all know must continue.

I believe my lived experience as an African-American, a Somali immigrant, a war refugee, and a young Minnesotan raising his family in the Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood will be a tremendous asset in these efforts - and will allow me to bring together the people of this city in a way the other candidates simply cannot do.

In 2017, we were promised a 'Fresh Start' for our city. As Mayor, I will make sure we get that 'Fresh Start' others have promised but never deliver.

3. Since George Floyd was killed in May 2020, cities including Minneapolis are reevaluating how they handle policing. How do you think law enforcement should be done in Minneapolis? And what do you think the balance should be between funding policing and violence prevention?

Law enforcement in Minneapolis must be founded in a comprehensive public safety approach - not a public health approach - and it must offer a form of law enforcement with policing services carried out by armed, licensed peace officers. The current Patrol and Investigations Bureaus services must carry on - and actively recruited and properly funded for a city our size.

My neighbors and I believe we will not reduce the crimes our residents are experiencing - or end the killing of young black men by some morally bankrupt officers - by simply reducing the size of the MPD. In fact, recent data (*William et al. 'Police Force Size and Civilian Race', 2021*) shows that larger police forces result in

black lives saved at about twice the rate of white lives. This study showed that by adding more police, the incidence of robbery, rape, and aggravated assault DECREASED, suggesting that merely having more police officers around drives it.

We must find a new balance in what it can mean to secure public safety. There is an opportunity for change and refocusing the priorities of our public safety departments. I have long advocated for the “koban” model of policing we see in Japan, where officers are present in local neighborhood business centers and streets – much like the DID Ambassadors in downtown Minneapolis.

Unarmed “koban” officers would be more able to respond to minor emergencies, give directions, and otherwise interact with residents on a more intimate basis than would be the case for police services in Minneapolis – and could be responsible for homelessness, addiction, mental health, and neighborhood safety response.

Our public safety model must include Victim and Survivor services (to promote safety, healing, and justice for victims and survivors of crime by meeting their individualized needs, upholding victims’ rights, and enhancing community responses to harm); Violence Prevention services (using community-focused, public health approaches to help ensure that everyone can be free from violence to break the cycle of violence by preventing it before it begins; intervening at the first sign of risk, and championing healing after it happens).

4. Also in the wake of Floyd’s death, there has been a national reckoning on race and racism. Some government leaders say they are looking at city operations overall through an “equity lens.” In your view, what does that mean? And how can Minneapolis combat racial discrimination and promote equity?

It means we are taking into consideration the lived experiences and perspectives of our racially diverse communities in our city. It is immensely important that our government asks itself questions about the impacts of various municipal projects, policies, or actions during the decision-making process and understands if there are unintended consequences that might impact these communities negatively.

And our city government does have an important role in combatting racial discrimination and promoting equity - because it has played a central role in creating and maintaining racial inequity. We must reconcile this as a city by doing all we can to ensure everyone who resides in the city is equitably served.

Our city government has the ability to implement policy change at multiple levels and across multiple sectors to drive change in how we as a city deliver services and solutions.

As mayor, I will combat racial discrimination and promote equity by ensuring the City pursues a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all and create opportunities for improvement in neighborhoods and communities that have been historically underserved.

Under my administration our city will continue to acknowledge and address the legacy and persistence of systemic racism wherever we find it; we will review and revise long-standing practices and policies to ensure all individuals are treated and provided services equally; we will absolutely embed fairness and inclusivity in decision-making processes; we will redress inequities in policies that serve as barriers to equal opportunity, and we will eliminate barriers to political participation in city government.

And the messenger matters, that's why as Mayor I would seek to appoint both a deputy mayor for tribal relations and a deputy mayor of diversity and inclusion within the office of Mayor. These positions (and others) will recognize the crucial role diversity, equity, and inclusion can and should play in Minneapolis.

5. Please briefly summarize your positions on the three ballot questions (government structure, public safety and rent control) that Minneapolis residents will vote on in November.

QUESTIONS 1 - EXECUTIVE MAYOR - LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Assembled by the Charter Commission, the "Government Structure Work Group" report summary (Dec. 15, 2020) explained in some detail that our city "lacks strong accountability, is overly complex, and highly inefficient". It is well past time that the City Council agreed to a more purely legislative role in policymaking. And it is well past time for the city to ban the City Council from purporting to direct or supervise any executive branch employee.

QUESTIONS 2 - DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

I believe in supporting and funding policing alternatives within the MPD that can provide for a policing system that is better prepared to face the public safety challenges of our city, as well as how we address and respond to public health and safety. Many people still feel comforted by the presence of police, so instead, we must address how policing and the internal structures of traditional policing need to change. I want to talk about the precedence for these changes and make sure that the new model of safety is validated and one which has overwhelming support from black and brown communities, as well as the city at large.

QUESTION 3 - AUTHORIZING CITY COUNCIL TO ENACT RENT CONTROL ORDINANCE
We need another tool in our city's "housing toolbox" to address the housing needs of all. Minneapolis must rise to the challenge of making rents stable and predictable for all who chose to call Minneapolis home.

6. Affordable housing is a critical issue in Minneapolis and other cities. What is the role of city government in ensuring citizens of all income levels have access to quality housing?

I believe everyone in Minneapolis deserves a space to call 'home'. That's why I believe we need a strong rent stabilization policy in Minneapolis. The city can – and must – do more. We are not far from a future where your average blue-collar worker making \$33k a year will find it hard to find an affordable apartment for themselves and their child. According to many economists, to remain affordable, housing costs must only be about 30% of a person's income.

I believe a universal rent control or stabilization ordinance that is properly funded and implemented in Minneapolis would allow us to protect renters from displacement; help renters strengthen their communities by allowing them to stay in their neighborhoods; stabilize our community schools by minimizing student relocation, and prevent increased homelessness.

If approved, I believe any ordinance should limit rent increases to inflation or the consumer price index or some similar formula; it should apply to properties that have a rental license; include protections against the amounts landlords can pass renovation and repair fees onto tenants; apply to the home, rather than the tenant, to avoid price-hikes when people move out. And I believe we should create a well-resourced renter protection board that empowers renters.

And no matter what the City Council might create, I believe it must return to the voters for their ultimate approval.

7. Mayor Jacob Frey recently proposed a \$1.6 billion city budget for 2022 that would include a 5.45% property tax increase. What do you think of that budget plan and what would your priorities be for city spending if you are elected?

I think the budget plan is reasonable for 2021 - especially given we are still dealing with the effects of Covid-19.

As for my priorities, I would fight for additional police recruits and cadet classes. I believe we must ensure the public safety of all residents and businesses. And while I appreciated seeing that the budget included funding for five recruit and cadet classes. This number only gives us a staffing level of 756 officers. I believe - given the recent judgment against the city on this matter - that we must add additional classes so that the monthly staffing level is much closer to the authorized 888 officers.

As for the property tax rates, I would continue - especially during this time - maintaining single-digit property tax increases for owner-occupied homes, apartments, and commercial buildings. In the future and to address the affordable housing crisis, I would like to see the city obtain the taxing authority to implement a sales tax on "luxury apartment" rents. This might be a 2 percent tax on monthly rent (like we see in Arizona).

If we are to ensure every resident or visitor is housed properly in our city, and new revenue authority and options must be pursued to expand the budget to tackle the growing challenges our city is facing.

8. Does the city have a role in helping Minneapolis students become well educated? What can/should the city do to help its younger residents?

The Minneapolis Board of Education (School Board) - and not the city - is responsible for selecting the Superintendent, as well as overseeing the district's budget, curriculum, personnel, and facilities but yes there is a role for the city.

We can do so much, but the thing that immediately came to mind was that we can ensure our residents better know the rich history of the land our city is on - and we as a city can better honor our indigenous neighbor's history and language by sharing it throughout the city (while also insisting on more funding for housing and addiction resources).

We can ensure our public transportation systems are better designed with schools in mind - helping us all ensure every student can get to their school safely and in a timely manner no matter where their school is in the city.

We must invest in real neighborhood community centers and health clinics - to help with addiction support, healthcare and community outreach, and improvement to the long-term health of the city. And we must better support the funding of our amazing MPRB - to ensure our youth can enjoy more of the activities and learning they offer.

9. How should city leaders help Minneapolis businesses – some of which are struggling to survive due the COVID pandemic?

The City of Minneapolis has been allocated a total of \$271 million of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) - \$102 million of which has already been allocated but not distributed, obligated, or spent.

There are already funds for us to help businesses - but not necessarily agreement. The Mayor would like to allocate \$119 million for "revenue replacement" for the 2022 budget to offset the \$129 million in revenue decline for the city in 2020. And who knows what the City Council will do.

But we need to engage our small businesses directly and bring them together so we can listen to what they say will help. I've had some of my most energized conversations with small business leaders in the city - as I ask them how things are going for them. It's a struggle for so many restaurants and small shops in the skyways and all over the city.

As Mayor, I would call multiple Business Roundtables - to get out and publically listen and hear from business owners directly. What do they need? What are their concerns?

And yes, we must help all businesses where we can as a city - but we must put an additional lens on providing real support for our BIPOC small businesses and arts organizations.

10. **If you were singing the praises of the city to encourage businesses or individuals to come to Minneapolis, what would you say? What do you see as strengths of the city?**

Minneapolis is truly an amazing city - and I would tell them, "I'm living proof". I would share my journey as a war refugee - and how as a young teenager I struggled to find direction and dropped out of school.

And then I moved to Minneapolis. And here - thanks to a lot of family and friends and the community - that same young high school dropout was encouraged to complete his education - obtaining both an undergraduate degree from the University of Minnesota and a Juris Doctorate at Hamline Mitchell.

I would share that Minneapolis has endless cultural opportunities - with a thriving music and artistic scene (and just about every other cultural happening one can imagine). Oh - and the amazing food experiences and sporting events!

I would share that they'd be hard-pressed to find a better city to locate their family or their business - or find some of the most fun, educated, and hardworking people around. And that's even in the winter!

And yes, I would tell them to join us in the "City by Nature". A city with thirteen lakes within the city limits and something to do outside, no matter the time of the year, will be one of the best choices they could ever make!

11. Please tell us about your campaign for this office. How much and what type of campaigning are you doing to get your message out to voters? How much money had you raised as of Aug. 31?

The campaigning experience has been amazing - and a real journey. We are putting much of our efforts in just getting out and meeting voters where they are - in their neighborhoods. This summer I visited every neighborhood in the City - from Longfellow to Armatage to Mid-City Industrial to Camden - and everything in between!

We've been reaching out to voters in multiple ways. We also have two full-time Campaign Management Directors and one full-time Communications Director.

But the real work is being done by our Digital and Field teams. We have three, full-time digital marketing team members to get our messages and vision out to social media platforms. We have a very experienced, full-time Canvassing Captain, and fifteen full-time canvassers actively knocking on every door we can in the city.

They are joined by dozens of volunteers working outreach citywide, as well as in additional teams focusing on outreach to Somali and Latino communities.

And of course, we are holding a ton of "Meet & Greets" throughout the city - from Stonearch to Pershing Field Park. I just love getting out and meeting the people of this great city. And of course, knocking on doors to listen to the residents and business owners (and even visitors).

Lastly, in our last campaign finance filing in August 2021 we reported raising \$237,700 in the first seven months of this year.