

## Detroit Free Press City Council Candidate Questionnaire

**Name:** Saunteel Jenkins  
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**Employer:** Mariners Inn Treatment Center  
**Occupation:** Residential Treatment Program Director  
**How long?** 2 ½ years  
**High school diploma?** Yes School? Cass Tech Year? 1988  
**College degree?** BSW School? Wayne State University Year? 1997  
**Advanced degree(s)?** MSW School? Wayne State University Year? 1998

**Please list any previous public office to which you have been elected or appointed, beginning with the most recent:** Chief of Staff for Maryann Mahaffey, 1999-2004.

**1. Explain, in 50 words or fewer, why you are seeking a seat on the Detroit City Council.**

Detroit is experiencing the greatest challenges we've faced since the great depression. We're also facing a leadership crisis. We need leadership on city council who understands the issues and can make tough decisions. I have the qualifications, experience, commitment and character needed on council to help turn the city around.

**2. Describe any professional, educational or civic experience that has prepared you to play a constructive role on the city council.**

I have a diverse professional background, which includes corporate, non-profit and government experience, all of which have prepared me well to play a constructive role on the city council.

Currently, I'm serving as the Program Director of a substance abuse treatment program for men. This experience not only gives me an understanding of the challenges faced by the many families in this community affected by homelessness, drugs and poverty, it has also given me first hand knowledge of how non-profits are affected by the city's block grant funding and payment process.

I've worked as a National Business Development Director for an educational services company. During my tenure there I led the opening of seven offices across the country and worked with school systems in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Oakland, CA, Tampa, Fort Lauderdale and others. I was able to gain a broader knowledge base on how and why school systems in other urban areas work—or don't work. Also, being responsible for opening offices enabled me to see how much easier it is to do business in other cities.

My greatest preparation for serving in a constructive roll on city council came from my six years (one year internship and five years on staff) in the late Maryann Mahaffey's office. I learned the charter mandated roles and responsibilities of city council. I learned how to write, introduce and have an ordinance passed. I participated in the budgeting process, providing in-depth analyses for multiple departments. I worked on some key issues including: casino development agreements; housing development projects; business development projects; homelessness; predatory lending; and many other relevant issues. The most important lesson I learned during my tenure in Maryann's office was the necessity of an open and honest process within government. Even when opposing an issue, the process must be one of integrity.

My bachelors and masters degrees in Social Work prepared me well for public policy analysis and advocacy. Social work also teaches the importance of approaching issues from a holistic perspective. Most issues are multi-faceted and we need people at the city council table who will do the proper analysis needed to make sound decisions.

Finally, I've given community service to organizations throughout the city including: Traveler's Aid Society of Detroit Board of Directors; *Treasurer*, Detroit East Community Mental Health Center Board of Directors; Kellogg Youth Development Seminars; 100 Black Men of Detroit's Mentoring Program; Focus: HOPE; and Detroit Executive Service Corp.

All the above mentioned experiences have prepared me well to provide new leadership and new results on Detroit City Council.

**3. What do you anticipate spending on your campaign? How much have you collected so far? How many people have contributed?**

I anticipate spending approximately \$200,000 on my campaign, approximately \$100,000 in the primary and \$100,000 in the general. So far, with approximately 80 donors we're about half way to our goal for the primary. And we have several major fundraisers scheduled in the next five weeks.

**4. Please list what you consider to be the three most important core functions of city government.**

1. Public safety, which includes police, fire and EMS.
2. Public works, which includes garbage pick-up, road maintenance and repairs, maintenance of traffic signals, and other related services.
3. Code enforcement, which includes construction, property maintenance, control of illegal dumping and zoning.

**5. Please identify three governmental departments or functions you would be willing to eliminate.**

Eliminating governmental departments would require an in-depth analysis of the budget, the number of positions within the department and the services provided by the department. That being said, I would consider eliminating:

1. Civic Center/Cobo Convention Center as a city agency
2. Planning and Development Department's Real Estate Division

3. Combine the Human Services and Senior Citizens Departments

**6. What changes in staffing, compensation, benefits or work rules do you believe will be required to assure Detroit's continued solvency?**

I believe there will be many changes needed to ensure Detroit's solvency. However, deciding exactly what those changes will be requires a thorough audit of the finances and services provided by every department and every position in the City.

**7. With money available to tear down only 3,000-5,000 a year, how would you speed up the demolition of the estimated 80,000 abandoned homes and buildings in Detroit?**

Currently, there are approximately 9,000 homes on the demolition list. One of the obstacles that can often slow down the demolition process is owner notification, which is mandated by state law. Of course, funding is another issue because there are generally more homes on the list, than there is money to demolish them.

While demolition is the only option for many abandoned homes because they've been burned, vandalized, or deteriorated beyond the point of repair, I do not believe all vacant/abandoned buildings in the City need to be demolished. There are at least two reputable non-profits that have researched the vacant properties issue in Detroit. I would look to them for recommendations on best practices across the country, as well as recommendations that address vacant property issues unique to Detroit.

One initiative I would support is a process for families to purchase inhabitable vacant city owned homes for a nominal fee, if they agree to fix it up and live there for at least five years. I would also support doing something similar with commercial properties for anyone who has a viable business plan.

Having a comprehensive plan for redeveloping our neighborhoods that included a plan for vacant/abandoned buildings could potentially speed up the demolition process by reducing the number of properties that reach the demolition list in the first place.

**8. Detroit's dwindling population is distributed over a geographical area many times the size of other cities. Do you support efforts to concentrate residents in a smaller portion of the city? If so, how would you facilitate this and what short-and long-term uses would you envision for vacated neighborhoods?**

Detroit is the only major city I know of that has lost enough of its population to create another major city. It creates a very difficult and unique challenge. I support efforts to concentrated residents in a smaller portion of the city, but it must be done in a way that is fair and equitable to any residents being displaced or relocated. And changes of this magnitude must be data driven.

I would bring in urban planning experts from Wayne State University and University of Michigan to help the city come up with a plan for "right-sizing" the city. I understand that we could shrink the city by moving everyone closer to the center, or we could create smaller sections across the city with residential communities and more green space.

I would propose rezoning portions of the land for urban farms, community gardens and small parks. However, the unique issues and characteristics of each community must be taken into account before specific plans are initiated.

**9. Do you support the agreement the Cockrel Administration negotiated to transfer the ownership and operation of Cobo Hall to a regional authority? If not, how would you propose to finance the expansion and operation of a convention center that costs Detroit \$20 million annually to support?**

I was in support of the agreement the Cockrel Administration negotiated for Cobo Hall. While I believe it was an imperfect deal, I also believe the regional authority would be able to facilitate the repair and expansion of Cobo much more expediently than the city could. We would also save millions of dollars annually that could be used for core services that impact our residential neighborhoods, i.e. more police officers, street lights and garbage pick-up. I support Mayor Bing's efforts to rewrite the agreement in a way that can lead to its approval by Council, including the proposed change under which the City would retain ownership of the center while turning it over to a regional authority, just as the city did the DIA, the Zoo and the Historical Museum.

**10. How important is it to you to improve relations between the city of Detroit and the rest of the metropolitan region?**

Highest Priority  Somewhat important  It matters but not critically to the city  
 not very  not at all

**11. How can the city provide better bus service?**

A viable public transportation system is a critical part of having a vital urban center, particularly at a time when gasoline is becoming more expensive again. Many senior citizens and disabled residents, some of our most vulnerable citizens, need a reliable public transit system to get to work, to school, to shop, to doctor appointments, to church and to other destinations. I would work to undertake a complete review of DDOT operations, including its routes, its purchasing and inventory operations, fare box operations and maintenance operations to assure that all systems are up to date and workers have the resources needed to be as efficient as possible. I also support the creation of a light rail system along Woodward Avenue from downtown to Eight Mile Road. Such a system would be the start of a regional transit system.

**12. Which if any of the city's assets should be put up for sale to raise revenues or reduce expenses? How would you evaluate proposals to sell any such asset?**

All proposals to sell city assets must be considered on an individual basis. Consideration must include a value comparison to similar assets in other cities, the short-term vs. long-term financial benefits, and any impact on the workforce. Without doing a complete analysis I would not speculate on any assets being sold.

**13. Is it a good idea for the city to raise money by selling for an up-front cash payment its revenue from such sources as public parking or Detroit-Windsor tunnel tolls?**

Again, without seeing the full details of the proposed agreement I do not want to speculate on the benefits of selling the public parking or tunnel revenues. Agreements of this kind have proven successful in other major cities, such as Chicago. However, we have to weigh the short-term vs. long-term benefits.