



City Council Candidate Survey 2021 Birmingham Municipal Election

Greater Birmingham Ministries invites you to complete this candidate survey. Your responses will inform our non-partisan 2021 Birmingham Municipal Election Guide, which will reach over 20,000 Birmingham residents. Please return your completed candidate survey to electionguide@gbm.org by July 2.

Name: Darrell O'Quinn

District: 5

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Campaign Website: WWW.VOTEDOQ2021.COM

Campaign Social Media Pages: Vote Darrell O'Quinn 2021 on Facebook

1. Please provide a 2-3 sentence biography.

Darrell O'Quinn has served as City Councilor for District 5 since 2017. Prior to being elected to the Council, he served as a community leader in many capacities, including as President of the Citizens Advisory Board which represents all of the City's 99 neighborhoods. He's been happily married to Kristina for 27 years and has two teenage children.

2. Please name any endorsements you have received.

Endorsements from neighborhoods residents across District 5 can be viewed on my campaign website and social media pages.

3. What are the biggest issues in your district and how would you address those issues in your role as a councilor?

Transportation and mobility in general have been and continue to be major areas of concern for me. Ease of mobility is critical to creating improved access to health care,

employment, and education opportunities. In my first term I was successful in convincing the Mayor and my Council colleagues to support various measures including a Complete Streets ordinance, implementation of the Birmingham On Demand public transportation service, and making way for shared-use micromobility vendors to operate. With the soon to be completed Birmingham Express (BRT) and redesign of BJCTA's MAX system, mobility in Birmingham is steadily improving. I have also been a strong supporter of the City's Dept. of Transportation traffic calming efforts to reduce speeding in our neighborhoods.

I share my constituents' concern over the growing amount of violence, particularly gun violence. Effectively addressing this issue requires a multi pronged approach ranging from community street outreach teams to hospital-based violence intervention programs to conflict resolution training. Each component works in concert with the others to create a comprehensive community wide approach. In partnership with other agencies such as the Jefferson County Department of Health, the Birmingham City Council is playing an active role in developing these initiatives to reduce violence and promote peace.

Over my many years of community service in Birmingham, blight has consistently been among the top concerns of neighborhood residents across the entire city. In some communities, more than half of the properties are >5 years tax delinquent and have effectively been abandoned. Creation of the Birmingham Land Bank Authority was a major step towards addressing this issue, but it's progress has been slow relative to the scale of the problem. Current estimates put the number of land bank eligible properties in the tens of thousands. I believe the \$141M in American Rescue Plan funding the City recently received represents an opportunity for Birmingham to not only address the pandemic-induced increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless, but to also improve blighted properties by advancing homeownership. I believe this initiative should be targeted particularly towards Black Birminghamians who are currently renting and who's families have struggled to build generational wealth.

4. How do you think the City of Birmingham should provide economic and corporate incentives?

In general, incentives should only be considered where they are needed to grow the local economy. Creation of employment opportunities for City residents should be the first consideration when considering incentives. Ideally, these jobs should be located along public transit routes or, better yet, in close proximity to communities where there's an available workforce in need of employment. Secondly, incentives must be justified by significantly contributing to the tax base. Municipal services are not free. In Birmingham, business-related taxes make up the majority of City revenue.

5. In 2020 Birmingham had the highest homicide rate in 25 years. So far 2021 is on trajectory for an even higher homicide rate. In your role as a councilor, how would you address crime and public safety?

The comprehensive community wide approach to reducing violence briefly described above is in many ways essentially about fostering healthy human relationships. Many of the perpetrators of local homicides were well known by their victims, in some cases even close family relations. This illustrates the need for us to employ various techniques aimed at promoting deescalation and peaceful conflict resolution. It also illustrates the need for investing in the self worth of individuals such that they hold themselves in high regard and are less likely to jeopardize their lives and their futures by resorting to violence. These are large societal issues not unique to Birmingham. However, I have often said that the first step to changing the world is walking out your door and being a good neighbor. As a City Councilor, I have actively advanced the idea of a “symphony of service.” There is a role for all of us in addressing violence and all of us are needed.

6. In your opinion what are the most critical public services that the City of Birmingham is funding or should fund and how will you use your position as a councilor to ensure these are funded?

Public safety, which includes all of our first responders and Public Works services, is one of the fundamental functions of municipal government. I also believe that our transportation infrastructure is critical because it is the connective tissue that connects each to each other, to services, to employment, etc. We have begun to address decades of neglect. I will remain committed to making our streets safer and more accessible to all.

7. Where in our communities do you see opportunities for Birmingham government to address the inequity between people of different races, genders, and sexual orientations, and how, as a councilor, will you support policies to address these gaps?

It's important for us to realize that inequity – apart from simply being morally wrong – jeopardizes the advancement of our society. Inequity is at the root of many of the issues we struggle with on a daily basis. As a leading representation of our collective, government has responsibility for crafting an environment in which all can thrive. As mentioned above, one of my passions has been to reduce barriers to mobility, which I believe addresses a important contributor to inequity: segregation. Additionally, one of the primary responsibilities of the City Council is appointment of individuals to serve on various boards and agencies such as the Human Rights Commission, which was created in part to guide elected leadership in addressing systemic inequities based on race, gender, and sexual orientation. Thus, it is important for the seats of these types of entities to be populated with competent individuals representing all sectors of our society, particularly those that historically have been marginalized.