

Thad Williamson for Richmond City Council

Comprehensive Policy Guide

Overview

I'm running for 5th District Richmond City Council because I have a vision, forged in community with others, of a community with much less poverty, much better schools, and a much more effective government. I have had the privilege to build towards that vision and accomplish some important things for the community in my previous roles. I offer hands-on practical experience with getting things done in our City government and deep knowledge of policy and practice. I did not enter this race to start a political career; *the focus of my energy is solely on improving the 5th District and the City of Richmond.*

I've issued many blog posts, policy statements, and questionnaire responses – this comprehensive guide compiles and organizes my positions by topic area. I hope you find it helpful in your review of candidates.

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Experience

I am an Associate Professor of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond, where I have taught since 2005. I also have extensive experience in city government having served as the first director of the Office of Community Wealth Building and as a senior policy advisor in the Mayor's Office. That mixture of academic expertise, hands-on knowledge, and experience getting things done makes me a unique candidate in this race. This section explains why.

A Track Record of Getting Things Done

The City of Richmond is diverse and complex. No district exemplifies this more than the Fifth District. The 5th is the City's most diverse district demographically, and each of its neighborhoods has a unique character as well as specific and legitimate concerns.

Likewise, governance in the City is complex—and necessarily, a team sport. There are agencies that report to the Mayor, agencies that report to City Council, agencies that report to Council-appointed boards, and one really big agency that reports to an elected board—in addition to a multitude of community organizations that receive support from or partner with City government.

Knitting together coalitions and teams to get important things done across agency lines as well as lines of race, gender, generation, and geography is not just something I have talked about or promised to do. It's something I have been doing over the past decade. And my efforts have led to significant positive impact during multiple City administrations and in a variety of policy areas.

I took the lead role in shaping the many ideas generated by the [Mayor's Anti-Poverty Commission](#) into a coherent set of recommendations, published in 2013. It has proven to be the basis for an integrated policy approach, working with community experts in housing, education, transportation, and economic development.

I partnered with Councilwoman Ellen Robertson to identify specific action steps in areas that City government could undertake and make meaningful progress on, even with limited resources available. We not only pulled together community leaders and City staff members, we also established an advisory board of experts—the **Maggie L. Walker Citizens Advisory Board**, consisting of persons directly impacted by poverty and inequity. The Board reviewed every proposal before it was sent to the Mayor and ultimately City Council for approval.

That work was very involved, with dozens of meetings of eight different committees, which I organized and coordinated on a volunteer basis. But it laid the groundwork for the successful **launch of the Office of Community Wealth Building** (OCWB) in 2014 and a series of new initiatives.

I was then selected to be the first director of OCWB where I led similar processes aimed at substantial reform. We created a partnership between Economic and Community Development, Social Services, and RRHA which led to the successful **BLISS** program providing wrap-around support services to families based in public housing. We partnered with the Richmond City Health District and RRHA to create a new community navigators program, and later we partnered with these same organizations plus the nonprofit Richmond Opportunities, Inc. **to create a family transition coach program** that has been working with families in Creighton Court over the last three years.

We partnered with Richmond Public Library and Richmond Public Schools to create the popular RVA Reads program in the city's pre-K centers, which now distributes over ten thousand books a year to our youngest readers. We partnered with Richmond Public School and the Richmond Public Schools Education Foundation **to create the RVA Future program**, which just completed its fourth year of operation in all five comprehensive high schools, helping hundreds of high school seniors navigate the college application and financial aid process and develop solid post-graduation plans.

We also aggressively sought grant funding from private and governmental sources. Our collaborative work on early childhood earned a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 2015, and our work with the advocacy group Virginia First Cities eventually led to the establishment of a statewide grant program benefiting cities investing in workforce development and community wealth building strategies—**with the City of Richmond drawing roughly \$2 million of funding per year since 2017**. That funding has allowed the Office of Community Wealth Building to expand in the last two years from one career advising station citywide to four centers serving hundreds of residents.

On an even larger scale, I led and managed the process that created the RVA Education Compact, ultimately adopted on unanimous votes by both City Council and School Board—a historic framework for collaboration between the Mayor, City Council and School Board. I led over a dozen public meetings concerning the Compact as well as countless private discussions and negotiations with elected officials and concerned

advocates. I believe the Compact has much more work to do (more on that in a future post), but it has helped change the conversation and pave the way for the significant funding increases RPS has received in the past two years.

There's more: I also directed the 41-member mayoral transition team, and then worked within City Hall to develop a performance management strategy involving every city agency.

In short, I have put my ideas to the test of public scrutiny repeatedly over the last ten years, and I have worked with others to build consensus for action—action that has produced tangible results.

That's the kind of leadership experience the 5th District needs and deserves: leadership that is equally comfortable and effective in settings from living rooms to board rooms, from community centers to City Hall, and leadership that is committed to finding the common ground needed to move forward on our most difficult problems.

My goal in running for City Council is to leverage that experience and knowledge—of the community, of policy, and of the agencies—to benefit the 5th District and the city as a whole.

Education

I believe in public education, and I am invested in Richmond Public Schools: as a parent of an RPS student (7th grader), as a member of the RPS Education Foundation board, as a policymaker, and as a community member. This section collates my campaign statements related to public education.

[Fifty Fixes for the Fifth, Back to School Edition! #6-10.](#)

Summertime was fantastic, but now it's time to hit the books again. About 25,000 Richmond students returned to class last week to open the 2019-20 academic year. Their success this upcoming year is truly the mark of our success as a community.

This is an especially important year because it marks the first full year of implementing the RPS Strategic Plan, [Dreams4RPS](#). The City of Richmond stepped up to the plate to

provide full funding for the plan this year, and critical action steps in a number of areas—from improving Human Resources to curriculum improvements to broadening access to advanced courses—will be made this year.

I'm a big fan of *Dreams4RPS*. It's a strong plan, it's holistic, it reflects community input, and the RPS administration has attached clear price tags to its component parts. The most important thing City Council can do to support education in Richmond is to find the resources to continue funding this ambitious plan.

Here's the reality of the situation: while the City was able to come up with additional local funding this past year, the strategic plan calls for an *additional \$18 million* of new funding in 2020-21. The newly elected representative to City Council's 5th District is going to walk in on December 1 facing a hugely challenging budget process.

I believe we need to find a way to make the investments called for by the plan, for reasons detailed later this week in Fixes 7, 8, and 9 (focusing on early learning, supporting teachers, and connecting graduates to college and career). How we can get there, I'll talk about on Friday under Fix 10 ("Making the Education Compact Work.")

But let's start with something more fundamental.

Fix #6. Build Community Support for Every 5th District School

The 5th District is home to Maymont Pre-K, Amelia Street School, John B. Cary Elementary School, Swansboro Elementary School, Patrick Henry School for Science and the Arts, Binford Middle School, George Wythe High School and Open High School.

Many 5th District students also attend numerous schools physically located outside the district: Blackwell Elementary School, Westover Hills Elementary School, William Fox Elementary School, Albert Hill Middle School, Elkhardt-Thompson Middle School, Armstrong High School, and Thomas Jefferson High School.

The only way each of these schools can thrive is if RPS as a whole is thriving. That's why implementing the RPS Strategic Plan effectively is so important. We must move from having "pockets of excellence" to having system-wide success.

Each school in the 5th District has distinct needs. But here's one thing all of them have in common: they could all benefit from **strengthened community support**,

whether that means building on existing partnerships and relationships, strengthening enrichment opportunities for our students, or revitalizing and building capacity for a school PTA.

As a City Council representative, I would see it as part of my job to help folks connect the dots: to make sure people who want to help and have the resources to do so are connecting with school-based leaders and community members. I have a lot of experience facilitating partnerships and bringing people together, on small and large scale. And I don't have any problem challenging folks with resources to do more to support our schools.

But make no mistake, the initiative for change to build stronger support for our schools must focus on empowering school-based leaders (staff, parents, families). Several action items within Priority 4 the *Dreams4RPS* plan focus on building school-based capacity for community engagement. As Council member, I will take my lead from those leaders as well as from the 5th District School Board representative to find out what is needed to bolster community support for our schools; then I will do what I can to help make it happen.

Fix #7. Invest in Early Learning (Dreams4RPS, 1/3). (Part Two of Back to School Week!)

Our community, and our society, needs to invest more in early childhood education. When kids arrive at Kindergarten without basic foundations in place (as [1 in 4 Richmond kids now do](#)), the risk of falling behind grade level at an early point and never catching up rises.

This is an issue I worked on intently as director of the Office of Community Wealth Building from 2014 to 2016. In our first year, we partnered with Richmond Public Library and Richmond Public Schools to launch the popular RVA Reads program in pre-Kindergarten centers throughout the City. That program is still going strong: last year, RVA Reads distributed over 10,000 books to pre-K children while also carrying out monthly readings of the book-of-the-month led by community volunteers in each pre-K center.

We also collaborated with RPS and partners like Smart Beginnings to land a three-year grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to develop a systemic analysis of Richmond's early childhood landscape and to engage public housing residents on early childhood needs. That work is now carried forward as the RVA Education Compact.

Certainly there are important, relatively inexpensive things the community can and should do to support parents of young children in Richmond. An important community-based model is the [Boston Basics](#) campaign which focuses on promoting five key parenting practices to support the learning and growth of very young children:

- **Maximize love and manage stress**
- **Talk, sing, and point;**
- **Count, group, and compare;**
- **Explore through movement and play;**
- **Read and discuss stories.**

A parallel group has been launched in Chesterfield County called [RVA Basics](#); I strongly support bringing this community effort to scale here in the City of Richmond. All parents should have access to research-based information and support to help their children learn in their youngest years.

We also need to make good on a central recommendation of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant final report: to create a new office or unit within the City, likely based in Human Services, to take responsibility for coordinating and planning services impacting children aged 0-3. **Right now, there's no clear answer to the question "Who in the City of Richmond is responsible for fostering healthy child development for kids aged 0-3?"**

The Children's Cabinet of the Education Compact has been examining action options to remedy this situation and is expected to issue a recommendation this fall. If they recommend creating a new unit or office focused on this issue, I will enthusiastically support its inclusion in the FY 2021 budget if elected to City Council.

But deeper interventions—namely assuring that all kids have access to a quality preschool environment, and that we move to providing preschool for children aged 3—will require substantial investments. That's why I'm particularly excited about [Action 1.8 of Dreams4RPS](#), which envisions enrolling 60% of 3-year-olds in preschool by 2022-23. That process would start in 2020-21 with the enrollment of 20% of 3-year-olds, at a price tag of \$4 million.

Whether through new state dollars or local funding, **this is an investment we must begin to make as a community.**

Fix #8. Support Our Teachers and Strengthen Classroom-Based Learning (Dreams4RPS, 2/3). (Part Three of Back to School Week!)

A strength of the [Dreams4RPS](#) plan is that it drills down to the crux of the issue facing Richmond Public Schools: how to improve classroom learning, to make sure that every day, every hour, students are learning and developing their capacities. There are many dimensions to this work: curricula, materials, resources, professional development.

The most fundamental factor, however, is having a caring and skilled teacher in every classroom. During my daughter's years at John B. Cary Elementary School, I personally witnessed how strong teachers can help offset various challenges and help students achieve academic success.

Priority 2 of *Dreams4RPS* focuses on recruiting and retaining excellent teachers and staff, and identifies action items from overhauling the RPS Human Resources division to providing financial incentives (such as housing support) to help retain teachers.

Let's get right to the point, however: RPS teachers need to get better compensated. Those enhancements aim to "ensure that: 1) RPS teachers are paid at, or above, the Virginia average; 2) RPS teachers serving in our highest-priority schools are the highest paid in the Commonwealth; and 3) all roles have a clear and consistent salary progression, year over year."

I strongly support each of those goals and will prioritize their full funding. That means an [additional investment of \\$2.2 million in the FY 2020-21](#) budget compared to the current baseline, rising to \$7.2 million in new investment by FY 2022-23.

This is no small investment and commitment. But we have to do it, and should do it enthusiastically and proudly.

Fix #9. Dramatically Strengthen Pathways to College and Career (Dreams4RPS, 3/3)

From a pedagogical point of view, the boldest step charted in [Dreams4RPS](#) is Action 1.1: "Passion4Learning," an effort to "nurture our students' passion for learning by creating an exciting, hands-on and rigorous theme at every RPS middle & high school."

It also would involve enhancing enrichment activities for all RPS students beginning at the elementary school level.

Here's a basic fact about RPS: it's at the middle school level that catastrophic gaps between our achievement levels and statewide levels begin to emerge. It's clear we need to do something dramatically different at the secondary school level.

Binford Middle School in the 5th District, which has had a dramatic turnaround since adopting an arts focus in its curriculum, is a good example of what "Passion4Learning" might achieve. The RPS strategic plan calls for investing \$3 million in 2020-21 to begin making this happen at one middle school and one high school.

Supporting that effort is important. So too is ramping up programs and initiatives, inside and outside of RPS, that explicitly begin preparing students for career and/or college. Examples include [NextUp RVA](#) (after school programs based in middle school), the [Mayor's Youth Academy](#) within the Office of Community Wealth Building (providing direct workforce experience), and the [RVA Future Centers](#) (working within each comprehensive high school to help students apply for college, financial aid, scholarships, and career opportunities).

I know each of those specific programs very well, and played a major leadership role in establishing the RVA Future Centers in 2015 when I directed the Office of Community Wealth Building, as a model partnership between the City, RPS, and a nonprofit (the RPS Education Foundation.) Each of these—and others—could reach significantly more students in an even more impactful way with expanded capacity.

Importantly, such partnerships can work in tandem with RPS's goal of expanding Advanced Placement offerings and other academic enhancements within the high schools—an area that the system had made visible progress in already. Right now fewer than 1 in 4 RPS students graduate with an advanced diploma, compared to about 50% statewide. That's another gap that must begin to close.

There is no reason why every Richmond high school student can't both graduate on time *and* have a clear plan and pathway for life after high school. But I believe we as a community must go a step further and provide concrete financial support to allow our graduates to attend at least a two-year college, and ideally either a two or four year college. That means tuition support, but also support for expenses. Money is a barrier to our capable graduates enrolling in college. A dedicated "Promise Scholarship"

program modeled off what has been done in [New Haven](#) and other cities would be a true breakthrough for our schools.

In this case, philanthropic resources rather than public money will necessarily be the driving force, as it has been in other cities with successful programs. But as a City Council member I will strongly support all the other investments *Dreams4RPS* envisions to prepare our secondary school students for a thriving future.

Fix #10. Make the Education Compact Work

This week's posts have highlighted some crucial aspects of the RPS strategic plan: early education, supporting teachers and staff, focusing on connecting students to career and college.

[Dreams4RPS](#) is an ambitious plan. It needs to be, because the challenges it seeks to tackle are massive.

This means it's not an [inexpensive](#) plan. In the near future, the Mayor and City Council are going to have to decide whether they are willing to fully back the forthcoming financial requests associated with the plan.

This is where the [Education Compact](#) comes in. The Compact has two principal ideas: first, the Mayor (who proposes the budget), the City Council (which takes final action on the budget), and Richmond Public Schools (the single biggest line item in the budget) should commit to year-round communication and collaboration. It's a good thing for RPS to be able to share its needs, plans and progress with the Mayor and City Council at more than just budget time; and it's a good thing for the Mayor and City Council to get regular updates on progress and be able to ask question, all year long.

The second thought behind the Compact is that to make transformational progress in Richmond, we need to take a holistic approach: addressing the needs of kids inside and outside the classroom. Agencies like Parks & Recreation, Library, Social Services, Justice Service, the Office of Community Wealth Building, and myriad nonprofit organizations receiving grants from the City all are serving the same students and families in RPS, with aligned goals.

Therefore the agencies should be talking to each other on a regular basis to find opportunities for collaboration, mutual support, and resource maximization, and we should be working towards having a single community-wide plan for children and

families that draws on and supports the work of each of these agencies. The Children's Cabinet of the Education Compact is working toward just that aim.

Going forward, the role of the Compact should only grow, if City Council fully buys in. As with all city agencies, there needs to be a balance of support and accountability with respect to Richmond Public Schools. The Schools should be expected to document their proposed use of funds in detail, and they should be expected to report out to the public on a regular basis on the use of the funds allocated. That's the fundamental basis of accountability.

As a member of City Council, I will work to make the Education Compact work. That means pushing both the City administration and RPS to be as clear as possible in justifying their budget proposals, and as transparent as possible in reporting out progress. It means pushing towards a holistic, comprehensive schools-and-community plan to support our families.

It also means aggressively going after philanthropic support, state funding, and federal funding to enhance RPS's resource base.

And it means committing to find the local public dollars needed to fund that plan (or explaining to the public clearly why the plan can't be fully funded in a given year).

My goal as a City Council member will be to find the dollars to fund plans that have a fighting chance to bring about the transformation of lives and educational outcomes our city needs and our children deserve; but it will also be to hold RPS (and partner agencies) accountable for dollars allocated.

I believe voters in the 5th District and throughout the City want to see RPS and our children succeed. But they also want to know (and be shown) that their tax dollars are being well spent, and that every effort is being made to garner funds from other sources (state, federal, philanthropic).

That's the dual responsibility of service on City Council—a responsibility I readily embrace.

Building A New George Wythe High School, Sooner, Not Later

George Wythe High School, the 5th District's only comprehensive high school, has a proud history. Richmond has an opportunity and responsibility to make sure George

Wythe has a bright future as well—by moving forward in an expeditious but thoughtful way to rebuild the high school and its campus.

City and school officials revealed earlier this week that they expect several million dollars to be available to begin a planning process with respect to rebuilding George Wythe once the current construction projects at George Mason Elementary, E.S.H. Greene Elementary, and the new Hull Street Middle School are complete.

The rebuild of George Wythe High School can't come fast enough. A voter living near the school earlier this week had an apt one-word description for the school's current condition: "dilapidated."

George Wythe was one of five schools originally planned to be built in the first phase of the facilities plan adopted by the School Board in December 2017. The new debt capacity made possible by the meals tax increase in July 2018 will be mostly spent on George Mason, Greene, and Hull Street.

Making sure the City finds the money to start and finish the job of building a new George Wythe High School as soon as possible will be one of my utmost priorities as a member of City Council representing the 5th District.

According to the [facilities funding plan](#) released by the Stoney administration in December 2018, an additional \$200 million in capital funding earmarked for schools will become available in fiscal 2024—that is, July 1, 2023.

*We can't wait that long to give our community
the new school it deserves.*

If elected to Council this November I will push to be sure as many dollars as possible are conserved to begin the planning process for Wythe in 2020, and I will work to find sufficient dollars in the FY 2021 and succeeding City budgets to allow construction to begin as soon as possible—ideally, by 2021.

If elected to a full term next year, assuring that the project is seen through in a timely and effective way will be at the very top of my priority list for the district.

Here's why: first, the facility needs at George Wythe are urgent, and the need for more high school seats on the Southside is also urgent. Wythe has seen a sharp increase in enrollment in recent years, including an increase in the number of Hispanic students from 116 in 2016-17 to 408 last year, and [analysis performed by Cropper GIS](#) for the School Board project Wythe's enrollment to exceed building capacity as soon as 2020-21, with crowding growing more severe each succeeding year. (The School Board is envisioning building a 2,000 seat high school—an addition of 600 seats--on the current footprint of the Wythe campus.)

Second, the rebuilt George Wythe has an opportunity to become a model **community school**: a facility that is not only a first-class educational facility but is a resource hub and facility for the surrounding neighborhoods. The City of Richmond should offer workforce development support to community members through the Office of Community Wealth Building as well as related services supporting families, just as it does at Huguenot High School. The facility should be made as accessible and usable as possible for community programming, recreation, and other uses on weekends and in the summer months. **The new George Wythe will be one of the most diverse schools in the district by ethnicity and primary language, and the community activities and services offered must reflect that.**

Third, the new George Wythe High School has the opportunity to be the anchor of **broader neighborhood revitalization** along the Midlothian corridor, involving new or revitalized commercial activity, housing, and transportation. Schools are embedded in and influenced by communities, and the revitalized Wythe is a chance to contribute to a stronger Midlothian.

Finally, the new George Wythe must not only be a first-class facility but be matched with strong curricular content and strong academic leadership prepared to assure that **a dramatically improved school facility helps realize dramatically improved educational outcomes.**

To bring this vision to life, **the community must be involved and its ideas heard and heeded**, at every step of the way. The critical work of planning and community engagement can and should start as soon as next year.

As a City Council member I will work tirelessly to assure that this major project stays on track, and I will work in collegial partnership with the 5th District School Board

representative and neighborhood leaders to be sure the community has a major voice in shaping the new George Wythe.

This is a major opportunity for the 5th District to get better in the areas that matter most: improving education and expanding opportunity. I'm incredibly excited and committed to making sure the new George Wythe High School does just that.

Time to Pair Up! Promoting Diversity and Equity in Our Schools

Richmond Public Schools is currently embarked on a comprehensive rezoning effort at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels.

The most significant proposal on the table involving the Fifth District is the idea of "pairing" John B. Cary Elementary School with William Fox Elementary School. Children from the combined zone would attend William Fox for grades K-2, then move to the John B. Cary building for grades 3-5.

The context for this proposal is that William Fox is about 60% white (non-Hispanic), and John B. Cary is about 83% African-American. As is now **widely acknowledged**, the 2013 rezoning after the closure of Clark Springs Elementary School actually exacerbated racial segregation by moving part of the Museum District from Cary to Fox. Last year there were 22 white (non-Hispanic) children at Cary, compared to 45 in 2012-2013; conversely there were 92 African-American children at Fox last year, compared to 119 in 2012-13.

What's wrong with this picture?

First, there is a resource equity issue. The PTA at William Fox has far more resources than the PTA at John B. Cary. That translates into more capacity to generate vital enrichment and engagement opportunities for students, families, and the surrounding community. It also translates into a disparity in voice when issues arise impacting schools and students.

Second, and even more important, is the fact that in the 21st century, America is defined by our diversity, and success in life (civic and personal) requires forming relationships and bonds with all different kinds of people. It's our ability to do that--or not--that will shape whether 21st century America becomes the inclusive democracy we are capable of becoming or a society riveted by divisions. And, as **VCU professor**

Kim Bridges documents in an **excellent recent op-ed**, it starts with how we teach our children.

What's exciting about the pairing proposal is that it offers an opportunity to fix this picture in a way that is positive-sum rather than zero-sum. No one is losing the opportunity to go to school with their neighbors with the proposal. Instead, the proposal expands how we are defining "neighborhood" and "community" in a way that will give all children opportunities to learn in diverse, excellent environments.

And let's be clear: Fox is a very good elementary school, and so is John B. Cary. We sent our daughter to John B. Cary for six full years, 2012-2018. As my spouse Adria Scharf and I recounted in an **August 2018 Richmond magazine article**, our daughter had a caring teacher in the classroom every year, learned an incredible amount in and outside the classroom, and has gone on to a successful start to middle school. We also were part of a diverse, friendly community of committed parents determined to support the school and our children.

The proposed pairing is thus an opportunity to make two very good schools even better.

An extensive community engagement process has been established by RPS to vet the rezoning options, which is important both to help citizens understand the proposals and to surface issues and concerns.

We do have to engage parents, but make no mistake, this is a community-wide decision about what kind of community we want to be.

Put another way, parent engagement in itself does not necessarily assure a just (or wise) outcome. For evidence, we need look no further than Richmond's own history.

But civic engagement and discussion, when it goes well, can bring to the surface hidden issues and background motivations, and allow perspectives to be challenged and broadened. There has been nothing said publicly in the current controversy that hasn't been said privately for years.

What's different now is that citizens have the opportunity to scrutinize and challenge those views. That's why it's heartening to see the pushback from so many community members, **including parents at Fox and Cary**, who favor creating more diverse classrooms for our community's children.

The reality of local politics is that many times you can't please everyone. Tough decisions have to be made. I believe effective leadership must be rooted in a clear commitment to core principles, and I believe to make progress in Richmond we must be willing to take risks.

It's time to move forward with a genuine effort to make our schools more equitable and diverse. *I support the Fox-Cary pairing proposal*, recognizing it is but one needed step towards creating more diverse classrooms citywide. While the final decision will be the School Board's, rezoning decisions have broad community-wide impacts and hence as a prospective City Council member I will use my voice to weigh in.

More importantly, whether or not my campaign for City Council is successful, I will continue to advocate for supporting all schools and supporting intentional, courageous actions to begin undoing our profound legacy of segregation.

It's the right thing for our community, and it's what our children need and deserve.

Community Wealth Building and Economic Opportunity

Expanding access to economic opportunity for 5th District residents is a central theme in my campaign, and it's something I have been working on for years in Richmond through my work to promote community wealth building as a people-centered, holistic approach to helping individuals, families, and neighborhoods achieve economic stability. This edition of Fifty Fixes for the Fifth focuses on practical strategies to begin connecting youth and adults to jobs in the 5th District, starting in 2020.

#26. Expand Workforce Development Centers of the Office of Community Wealth Building into the 5th District, on both sides of the river. The **Office of Community Wealth Building** takes a holistic approach to workforce development, aimed at identifying barriers to employment and developing a specific plan by which participants can obtain living wage employment and achieve financial stability over time. In the last fiscal year, some **600 participants** receiving intensive support **obtained employment**, and thousands more residents attended an OCWB job fair, training session, or related program. This represents significant growth since the

program's inception five years ago and significant progress towards the stated goal of helping 1,000 City residents a year out of poverty.

As the first director of OCWB (2014-2016) I am deeply proud of this work, but I also realize that many residents in the 5th District aren't aware of the initiative or how to access it. A major, year one goal for me on City Council will be to find the funding to allow OCWB to expand its physical presence into the 5th District on both sides of the river, ideally with locations in Randolph and Swansboro, so residents can easily access the support services, programs, and **job fairs** OCWB offers.

#27. Expand youth employment and training programs through the Mayor's Youth Academy and similar programs, and get more businesses in the 5th District to commit to hiring youth.

A major concern I heard all summer long in the community while knocking doors is the need for more summertime programs for youth in the 5th District. We need to set a community goal of every child having something productive to do every summer, and we need to expand opportunities for high school-aged youth to gain employment or pre-employment experience.

The Mayor's Youth Academy offers one such model, but it needs more support so more students can be enrolled. I will support expansion of the **Mayor's Youth Academy** and I will encourage more 5th District businesses in Carytown and elsewhere to participate in the program as employers.

#28. Strengthen the pipeline of high school students and recent graduates into apprenticeship programs

Hundreds of teenagers aged 16-19 in the City of Richmond are neither enrolled in school nor employed. That fact is a symptom of our educational failures, but it's also a cause of future economic distress. We can help address this major challenges by strengthening connections between high schools and trade apprenticeship programs such as the **Carpenters Union Training Center** in Ashland.

Every RPS high school graduate should leave school with a clear plan for the future; for many that will involve a two-year or a four-year college, but for others it could be an apprenticeship or training program. Investments in supporting the costs of an apprenticeship or training program for recent graduates would be money well spent: the opportunity to go into a trade, build skills and certifications, and beginning to earn

a substantial wage can be the difference between finding a successful pathway to economic stability and an adulthood on the economic margins. Richmond, whether through public or private funds, should invest in a “thirteenth grade” for its graduates that are not college-bound, to be sure as many as possible have the resources and support needed to participate in a trade training program or similar career-building pathway.

#29. Assure future economic development projects involving construction contain Project Labor Agreements to promote fair labor practices and family-sustaining wages

I am strongly pro-labor, and I am extremely proud to have the support of IBEW Local 666 and the KML Regional Council of Carpenters. But Virginia is a right-to-work state, making this a tough environment for unions to flourish in. One important tool to help defend labor rights, prevent wage theft, and promote family-sustaining wages is the Project Labor Agreement—an upfront agreement between developers and labor representatives (unions) on wages and work conditions. A Project Labor Agreement can both make sure that development projects involving construction treat labor fairly but also assure high quality of work performed and timely completion of projects. As a City Council member, I will fight to assure that Project Labor Agreements are part of any economic development initiative involving City resources.

#30. Support social enterprise development and robust workforce pipeline using VCU and VCU Health System as anchor institutions

Here’s the great opportunity still waiting to Richmond to build community wealth: a comprehensive commitment by our largest employers, such as VCU and VCU Health System, to deliberately create pipelines to employment for city residents *and* to support social enterprise development in our low-wealth neighborhoods. It should be clear to every high school student and recent graduate the steps needed to get a job at VCU Health, and VCU Health should cover most of the costs needed to establish a pipeline of City residents into such jobs.

The concept of anchor-based social enterprise development is that larger institutions (public, nonprofit, or private) commit to using some of their procurement spending to support emerging social enterprises (such as cooperatives and B-Corporations) that are specifically oriented to providing employment *and* ownership opportunities for low-wealth Richmond residents. The Office of Community Wealth Building has completed a feasibility study of this strategy, but more investment in the strategy is needed to put

concept into practice in Richmond, following the model of Cleveland and numerous other cities.

A firm commitment to a workforce pipeline and to social enterprise development ought to be an integral part of a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding between VCU and the City of Richmond, covering a range of issues.

Fostering Effective Government

Almost every resident has a horror story to tell about Richmond city government: a tax bill for a vehicle one no longer owns, a long and frustrating wait at the permitting office, massive potholes that reappear year after year.

At the policy level as well, many residents are skeptical of local government and unsure what their taxpayer dollars are doing.

I have a unique perspective on the challenge of improving Richmond city government. By profession, I'm a scholar and teacher, having been a professor at the University of Richmond the past 14 years.

But I've also worked, while on academic leave, as an agency director in the City of Richmond, overseeing the launch of the Office of Community Wealth Building, a poverty-fighting agency that helped 600 residents find living wage jobs last year.

In that role I hired over a dozen staff members, planned budgets, moved projects through the procurement process, designed programs, and wrote a comprehensive report documenting our progress. I worked with many agencies in the City of Richmond as well as with Richmond Public Schools and other agencies. And I laid the groundwork for a state matching grant that now cover over half of the annual budget of the Office of Community Wealth Building, making it one of the most efficient investments city government makes.

While I'm proud of the work our team accomplished to expand job opportunities, the work itself was often deeply frustrating. Processes and rules were unclear, everything took longer than it should, and clear leadership and direction were often lacking. At the same time, I did encounter (and hire!) many excellent professionals committed to public service who were doing the best they could in a challenging environment.

In short, I have seen the dysfunction of City Hall from the inside. And I have seen why it's so important to promote more effective government and governance if our city is to thrive. This section focuses on various recommendations I have made in this campaign to improve policy and process in City Hall, building on my past experience working on these issues.

Making Richmond City Government Work Better

The core purposes of Richmond city government are to provide and maintain the infrastructure required to sustain a modern city, provide educational and economic opportunities for residents, secure public safety, and sustain and improve neighborhood quality of life.

None of this work can get done without a consistently responsive and reliable city government. Yet Richmond residents over the years have been consistently frustrated by many aspects of core city services. It's frustrating when seemingly small things like uncut grass and potholes go unaddressed for months and months, and it's maddening when it takes longer to get a permit than it does to actually complete a project.

I have seen the other side of the process—life as an employee inside City Hall. To consistently improve outcomes for residents—getting the grass cut and the streetlights fixed—will require improving how the City functions as an organization.

This is a complex topic, one that resists glittering generalizations and canned answers. It's not simply a matter of asking agencies to be more efficient, and it's not simply about expanding funding in under-resourced agencies. Nor is it simply about invoking buzzwords like "accountability" or "performance metrics."

Instead, what's needed is a strategic approach based on detailed knowledge of the organization, both as it appears to employees and as it appears to residents.

This is hard work, but I am prepared to articulate some bold goals and a pathway forward. I start with five key steps. (Each of these statements are worthy of further elaboration, which I will provide in subsequent posts.)

The City of Richmond will never meet the standard of consistently providing first-class services to residents if it cannot attract, retain, and advance first-class quality employees.

The City should be able to point to each employee and explain why their job is important - if it's not important, it shouldn't exist. The City of Richmond needs a strategic plan shared with all agencies that lays out clear goals and expectations.

City Council should be a full partner in the development and dissemination of that strategic plan, and should have opportunities to articulate priorities and pose questions on a regular basis throughout the year, not just during budget season.

The Administration has a responsibility to focus greater attention on supporting the new Performance Management Office, charged with assessing and evaluating not only agency performance but structural issues within city government, and City Council has the right and responsibility to demand frequent updates on its work and progress.

The Administration and City Council simply must focus on five priority areas that are chronically under-staffed and in some cases under-performing: Human Resources, Procurement Services, the permitting unit within Planning and Development Review, Public Works, and the new Department of Citizen Service and Response. The performance and effectiveness of HR and Procurement impact government as a whole; adequate staffing of permitting and public works is critical to processing permits in a reasonable time frame and making sure common eyesores are attended to promptly; adequately staffing the Department of Citizen Service and Response is crucial to making the RVA 311 citizen request system work in a way that builds the community's confidence. Because of my previous roles, I am familiar with the functions, goals, and the challenges facing each City agency. At the same time, as a citizen I am familiar with the frustration Richmonders commonly experience when services are not delivered in a timely way and explanations are difficult to come by.

As a City Council member, I will be a driving force for ongoing organizational reform and improvement, from day one—both in the big picture and in the critical details. That's what the City of Richmond needs and what voters in the Fifth District deserve.

Jul 17: Fifty Fixes for the Fifth #1: Add a Residency Requirement to the City Charter

A few weeks ago we launched our "[Fifty Fixes for the 5th](#)" initiative. These are specific ideas to address problems and improve quality-of-life here in the 5th District. They can range from solving neighborhood-specific problems to larger-order policy ideas that impact the 5th. We've gotten great feedback so far (but always are looking for more). We're ready to roll out our first fix:

The City Charter should be amended, as soon as possible, to specifically and unambiguously state that elected officials must maintain residence within the borders of the district to which they were elected, for the entire duration of their elected term.

Lack of clarity and contrasting legal perspectives have led to the current situation, resulting in this year's special election. Voters in the 5th District, and every other district in Richmond, should never be placed in this position again. And there should never be any doubt among future elected officials as to whether they must reside in the districts they were elected to represent.

I urge the current members of City Council to place requesting an amendment of the City Charter to address this point on the City's legislative agenda, and to begin identifying legislative allies to sponsor the legislation in the General Assembly in January 2020 (Councilman Agelasto has already issued a similar request.)

I will leave it to attorneys to craft specific, appropriate language, but here's a general recommendation: Add a new paragraph, "D," to section 3.04.1 of the Charter, dealing with removal of elected officials. That paragraph should establish policy to this effect: "City council and school board members in the City of Richmond must maintain their primary residences within the borders of the district to which they were elected for the full duration of their terms, or they shall be considered to have vacated their elected position. The mayor of the City of Richmond must maintain primary residence within the boundaries of the City of Richmond for the full duration of his/her elected term, or shall be considered to have vacated the office of mayor." The intent of this provision is to establish as law citizens' common-sense expectation that elected officials live and spend most of their time in the district to which they were elected; further specific language and definitions should be added as needed to fulfill this intent.

This City Charter revision should take effect January 1, 2021 and hence apply, without ambiguity, to all Richmond officials elected to full terms in November 2020.

Let's take the current situation, learn from it, and use it as an opportunity to get better. Our current form of city government is relatively new, and we should be open to revising the City Charter periodically based on the test of experience. What's happened this year in the Fifth District is an experience Richmond should not have to go through again. Let's be sure that's the case by amending the City Charter.

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Our Fifty Fixes for the Fifth series resumes! Fixes #11-15 focus on improving city government in three areas: ethics, participation, and promoting equity. Read on!

11. Implement the recommendations of the Ethics Task Force from April.

In April a citizen-led Ethics Reform Task Force produced an insightful report concerning how to improve ethical conduct within City Hall. Its recommendations, if implemented, would help produce a needed culture change: one in which employees are expected and empowered to acknowledge potential or perceived conflicts of interest impacting their public responsibilities, in which there is written, comprehensive guidance for employees regarding ethics-related policies, and in which all employees receive annual training. The Task Force also called for legislative change to limit lobbying of city government by former public officials (elected or appointed).

These recommendations are reasonable; what's important are both the details and how committed Council and the administration are to implementing them. Councilperson Larson has introduced legislation calling for creation of an Ethics Reform Commission to provide advice and guidance on implementations of the Task Force Recommendations.

12. Appoint an Internal Ethics Czar

In addition to establishing the Ethics Reform Commission, I believe the City Administration should appoint an internal "ethics czar" who can provide practical guidance to employees regarding how to handle specific situations involving actual,

potential or perceived ethical issues before any action is taken, to assure that employees follow established policy and law and so that no employee can credibly say “I didn’t know” about a given regulation. This role should also have primary responsibility for proactively educating employees at all levels about policies and practices, year-round. Establishment and empowerment of this role could both reduce problems on the front end and contribute to needed cultural change throughout the organization. The ethics czar should be empowered to work across all agencies and required to provide regular reports to both the Mayor and the Ethics Reform Commission.

13. Refine City Policy to Strengthen Anti-Nepotism Rules

Recent events reveal the need and desirability to clarify anti-nepotism regulations with respect to chief executives. In Richmond’s unique system of government, all employees report directly or (in most cases) indirectly to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). The CAO in turn reports to the Mayor. It is inherently problematic for persons related to either the Mayor or the CAO to work in any agency that ultimately reports to them, regardless of the specific circumstances of said employment. In short, it shouldn’t happen. City policy and as needed relevant code should be amended to make this explicit and unambiguous going forward.

14. Participatory Budgeting!

I’m extremely excited and fully support the resolution presented by Councilmembers Addison, Agelasto and Larson calling on the Administration to set aside a total of \$15 million over the next five years in the capital budget—starting with \$3 million next year—for projects to be selected by citizens in a participatory budgeting process. Participatory budgeting is an established model in the Global South of democratic engagement: it asks citizens what projects and needs they see in their community, then allow them to select the top priorities (via voting) to move forward. Participatory budgeting has the potential to empower communities, develop new citizen leaders, and help all citizens better understand our city’s needs, challenges, and opportunities.

Bringing participatory budgeting to Richmond is a welcome civic innovation that is certain to attract much interest and attention from 5th District residents. Further discussion will be needed to flesh out the details, especially to assure that equity is promoted at three levels: equity between City districts, equity in who participates (with an explicit emphasis on promoting participation among marginalized groups), and equity in which projects are ultimately selected (to assure urgent community needs get

the most consideration.) A well-designed process can meet each of these dimensions of equity, but it is important to get the details right (and be prepared to adjust to the lessons of experience).

15. Equity Audit!

Speaking of equity ... Richmond is also overdue for a comprehensive equity audit of its core services. Which roads get cleaned fastest? Which medians get better grass trims? Which streets get plowed first when it snows? Which neighborhoods have easiest access to city services?

Which groups—by age, race, gender, income, neighborhood—most frequently and least frequently access available city services?

Some of this information could be gathered at relatively low cost by the existing Performance Management Office, which can (through the CAO) request all agencies provide specific data already in hand.

In other cases, a comprehensive approach might require agencies to begin collecting and reporting new data. [The City of Seattle](#) has been a national leader in developing a toolkit focused on racial equity in city services and outcomes; Richmond should learn from that model as well as other communities in this emerging national conversation.

Work of this kind is especially important for the 5th District, with our diversity and range of neighborhood conditions. A thriving Fifth District requires that all our neighborhoods are receiving an equitable share of city services; we cannot know that is the case until we commit to measuring it.

Greening Richmond: Sustainability, Parks, Transportation

Because I am most known locally for my work fighting poverty, many voters may not be aware that I also have worked extensively on environmental issues in my academic work, including my 2010 book critiquing suburban sprawl in the United States. Our children and our planet cannot wait any longer for a bold commitment to building green cities that emit less carbon, are transit-friendly, and steward our existing natural resources. This section details some steps Richmond should and must take in the next few years to start building a green city.

Fifty Fixes for the 5th, #16-20: Sustainability and the James River

We're back with the next installment in the Fifty Fixes for the 5th series: specific action steps and policies I will prioritize to improve life in the 5th District and Citywide as a member of City Council. This installment focuses on sustainability, and meeting the needs of the James River Park System. (We will address issues facing other parks in the 5th District in a future installment.)

Can you imagine a Richmond defined not only by a commitment to social and economic justice but a commitment to being a model green city, anchored by the James River? It's a big dream, but one we can work towards realizing with some initial action steps.

16. Make the City of Richmond's Sustainability Office a Permanent, Free-Standing Agency

There is no more urgent societal priority than reducing our carbon footprint. In the absence of the massive national action the climate crisis requires, localities must step up to lead the way. Indeed, even if we had a concerted national plan to reduce our carbon footprint, we would need vigorous action led by local agencies as well.

Here's what Richmond can and should do: We need to make the City's [Sustainability Office](#) a free-standing, permanent agency with a triple mandate: a) Developing a strategy by which City agencies (including Public Utilities) can measure and commit to limiting their carbon footprint; b) Developing a set of best practices applicable to other local public agencies that receive City funding and that have substantial carbon impact,

such as Richmond Public Schools; c) Engaging all residents and businesses in the City to drive down our carbon footprint. A well-funded Office could draft a strategic plan with specific action steps and timelines, with requirements for ongoing reporting to City Council on progress made.

The [RVAGreen](#) plan produced in the Jones administration is a great starting point, but to date it has not translated into concerted direct action or implementation of the many policy steps recommended in the report. Likewise the [RVA2050](#) commitment articulated by Mayor Stoney requires substantial work to be translated into a concrete action guide.

A free-standing, well-funded office directly reporting to the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Operations day-to-day but with direct access and regular direct reporting to the Mayor and Chief Administrative Officer is essential if the City is to make marked progress on the plans that have been drawn up. (Currently the City's Sustainability office has limited personnel and funding and is structurally located within the Department of Public Utilities.)

When elected, I will urge the Mayor to include establishment of the Department of Sustainability in his FY 2021 budget proposal, and if it is not included in the budget proposal I will seek to build Council support for a budget amendment and corresponding legislation to create such an agency within the next year.

17. Adopt and Support Implementation of the James River Park Master Plan

[The James River Park System Master Plan](#) draft completed this past summer is a terrific piece of work addressing current conditions and future challenges facing the park system, from accessibility to conservation to improving user experience. I will support its adoption as a Council member, and prioritize taking action on its key recommendations so as to facilitate increased access, usage, and appreciation of the James River by all Richmonders, especially youth.

I endorse former Planning Director Rachel Flynn's proposition that the most valuable land and property near our natural assets should belong to the public, and hence support moving quickly to acquire islands in the river that are now private property. I also strongly support investments to create outdoor educational centers within the

James River Park System to facilitate increased access, usage, and appreciation of the James River by all Richmonders, especially youth.

Items 18-20 speak to some immediate action items (many more could be listed!):

18. Conserve the Park!

The first obligation with respect to the James River Park is to preserve it for future generations.

The draft master plan for the park lays out numerous specific steps to achieve this goal: expanding conservation easements, conducting a natural resource inventory as a baseline for future efforts; increasing biodiversity; remediating land previously used for industrial purposes in the park; banning construction of any new surface parking near the lot and encouraging multi-modal access to the park; and more. The City needs to undertake the conservation action steps laid out in the plan, as soon as possible.

19. Assure RPS kids 4th grade and up visit the James River each year

The James River is the most spectacular and unique resource the City of Richmond has, and the James River Park System is potentially the most powerful tool our city has to teach all our children about the outdoors, ecology, the climate, and more. Yet too many kids in Richmond have never spent significant time in the James River Park.

We can change that. Let's make it a community goal that every year every RPS student from 4th grade and up spend a day of the school year in the James River Park—yes, to have fun and to appreciate the outdoors, but also to learn. And let's expand educational programming available for all ages in the park. The draft master plan envisions completing an Environmental Education Center at Pony Pasture and an Outdoor Educational Center at Reedy Creek, projects I will support as a Council member.

We need to do this, whether with public or privately-raised dollars, and we need to do it soon. Let's not deprive another generation of Richmond kids the chance to grow up with the river as a friend and teacher.

20. Staff the James River Park System Appropriately

Last but not least, it's critically important not to neglect the operating budget. James River Park System is chronically under-staffed relative to its mission and importance. Currently it has a total of seven full-time employees, for a resource estimated to

generate over \$33 million a year in economic activity for the city. The draft master plan boldly states: “An enhanced program of operations and maintenance could reflect the high value of the Park by matching world-class operations with a world-class destination. This would require additional staff as well as continued reliance on volunteers and private vendors.”

I agree with that statement. Finding funds for additional positions could lead to tangible improvements in programming and user experience nearly immediately. Let’s start work now towards the goal of making the James River Park System world-class in all respects by the year 2025—a priceless asset to be shared with both our own residents (starting when they are young!) and with visitors from near and far.

Fifty Fixes for the 5th, #21-25: Improving Transportation and Accessibility

This installment of Fifty Fixes focuses on transportation--helping residents of the 5th District better get around!

21. Create a new Department of Transportation with a Multi-modal, Safety-first Orientation

We urgently need a Department of Transportation led by a director oriented towards multi-modal transportation in City Hall (including pedestrians and pedestrian safety). The new department needs to integrate staff working on transportation-related issues currently dispersed in different departments, and it needs to lead the City’s relationship with GRTC.

When I worked in City Hall, I saw firsthand the challenges our current structure posed for project management of GRTC Pulse construction. I also saw firsthand a frustrating lack of communication between GRTC and the City administration on fiscal issues; as one of the largest recipients of non-departmental funding from the City of Richmond there needs to be transparent, yearlong dialogue about GRTC’s funding needs and what it has done with previously allocated funds. The new Department of Transportation should lead that conversation.

The idea of creating a Department of Transportation has been discussed inside the administration; I will support moving it forward should it be proposed this year. As evidenced by the tragic events of this week and other pedestrian deaths in our city this year, its initial focus should be promoting safety holistically.

22. Push for a Regional Transportation Network

Continued progress towards development of a regional transit system using primarily county and state resources – this is included in an important set of priorities that I helped establish and outline in the [Mayor’s Anti-Poverty Commission Report](#). Regional transportation is essential to better connect all residents to job opportunities throughout our region. Richmond currently ranks near the bottom of “Top 100” metropolitan areas in job accessibility via transit - development of such a system would be transformative for the 5th District and the entire city.

Building on the momentum established by the GRTC Pulse, and recent expansion of bus service to Short Pump in Henrico, we need to keep pushing for a comprehensive plan to connect our region together and promote access to employment opportunities for city residents, including those without a car. This likely must take the form of additional BRT-style corridors along our major regional arteries.

23. Expanded Bus Service for the 5th!

More frequent service within the 5th District to connect residents to emerging employment opportunities at or near Richmond Marine Terminal (Port of Richmond) and to connect residents more directly to the GRTC Pulse. Unfortunately, there is currently no direct service connecting Byrd Park, Randolph and Maymont residents to the Pulse via north-south arteries like Robinson Street ... this needs to change! Expanded service along Robinson Street has been listed as a priority by the Richmond 300 “[Future Connections](#)” map.

24. Shelter From the Storm

It’s time to install shelters at bus stops wherever feasible to provide riders with shade, seating, and protection from the elements. This is a matter of basic decency and concern for regular riders, and also will help encourage more people to use the bus.

25. Share the Road! Promote and Protect Biking

Complete outstanding and proposed 5th District projects in the Bicycle Master Plan including a [Roanoke Street bike lane](#), buffered bike lanes on Westover Hills Boulevard, while slowing car traffic and improving safety on existing bike lanes like Semmes Avenue. Previously I wrote in-depth about the implementation of [Vision Zero](#) to make our streets safer; successful implementation of a bold pedestrian safety strategy will

also benefit bikes (as would [fewer potholes](#)), but we also need specific public safety campaigns aimed at getting drivers to respect bicyclists sharing our roads.

Public Safety

Near the very start of this campaign, the hearts of everyone in the 5th District were broken by the senseless shooting death of Markiya Dickson. Nothing is more important than the safety of our children, and we need sustained urgency to create a safer city that protects everyone.

We also need safer streets for pedestrians and cyclists. This section discusses public safety issues impacting the 5th District and the City of Richmond as a whole.

Jun 6: Confronting Gun Violence in Richmond

Violent crime and gun violence are the very opposite of a thriving community. As Michael Paul Williams recently wrote, a community that cannot protect its children's safety is a community that is failing.

Tragically, there have been other Markiya Dicksons—other innocent Richmond children whose deaths have shocked the community and inspired calls for action. **Some action has been taken. But clearly, it's not enough.**

We must not only remember Markiya Dickson now, we must remember her and all victims when we set policies, when we create budgets, and when we demand accountability from our public agencies. That's what building a thriving city will require.

How can we build a community that is safer for everyone, especially persons of color who are disproportionately victims of violent crime?

Clearly no one action or one idea alone can do the job. Instead, we need a united effort to build a thriving community. That means:

- *Providing quality schools that show all children we believe in them and their potential*
- *Working with youth to teach conflict resolution skills*

- *Making sure all young people have access to great educational and economic opportunities*
- *Increasing the City's efforts to fight poverty and create pathways to economic security*
- *Looking at law enforcement practices top to bottom to get rid of racial bias and build trust in the community*
- *Developing affordable housing and improve neighborhood quality of life*
- *Applying a racial equity lens to policy creation*
- *Pushing the General Assembly to adopt stronger gun laws and protect public spaces*
- *Working with the Commonwealth Attorney's Office to implement its "Beyond Containment" vision for crime prevention*

Over the past eight years, I have taken on the toughest issues in Richmond public life—poverty, public education, improving the functioning of City Hall.

I'm not going to back off talking about these issues now that I'm a candidate for City Council.

We as a community have too much work to do.

I have a vision for a thriving city that invests in all of our people and I am determined to make sure our community acts with urgency--because honestly, we have to.

In the weeks to come I will continue to listen to the views of the residents and will share more thoughts and ideas on what I will bring to the table if I am elected to represent the 5th District on City Council.

I look forward to continuing the conversation while moving forward in a spirit of urgency.

Aug 16: Fifty Fixes for the Fifth #5: Slow Down! (Vision Zero)

We hear it and see it everywhere we go in the 5th District: cars need to slow down and drive safer. A voter on Semmes Avenue told us "the posted speed limit is 30 but cars go 45 and up" as cars whizzed past in the early evening. Multiple voters have remarked that some drivers don't seem to realize the Richmond International Raceway is in

Henrico County, not on our streets. And voters throughout the district have talked about the need for speed tables or establishing enhanced penalty speed zones in their neighborhoods.

On the average day in Richmond, there are [12.4 car crashes and 3.3 injuries](#). As of May 31, there have been eight fatalities on Richmond roads this year. Too many Richmonders know a friend or neighbor who has been killed by a motor vehicle in our city. I'm one of them.

The good news is that the City of Richmond has established a compelling plan to reduce traffic fatalities to zero, [Vision Zero](#). The plan encompasses executive action, legislative action, and cultural change. Michael Sawyer of the Department of Public Works, a superb public servant who spearheaded this plan, [has received national professional recognition](#) for his work putting this approach together.

This is promising, but obviously much more work must be done to bring the vision to life—and to make our streets safer. Members of City Council have important roles to play in all three components of the vision: making sure the administration follows through on its stated commitments, adequately funding the initiative and passing other supportive legislation, and working with community groups and residents to build a culture of safety.

I am prepared and eager to champion the Project Zero vision as aggressively as possible if elected to represent the 5th District, in cooperation with Council colleagues. I will support concrete steps such as allocating more resources to enforce speed limits, adopting anti-distraction legislation, adding more crosswalks and where needed more traffic lights, identifying and mitigating dangerous intersections, assuring construction projects don't create dangerous situations, aggressive public service announcements and signage to promote traffic safety., and more.

I also will champion and work with any neighborhood that wishes to become an enhanced penalty speed zone or to establish speed tables or other mechanisms to create safer streets—and assure that approved speed tables are fully funded. We need to pay special attention to streets around our schools, especially those ([like Patrick Henry](#)) on or near high traffic volume streets, to be sure that all kids and families can get where they need to go safely at all times.

We need to fund and implement the administrative and policy components of the Vision Zero plan, but there is no substitute for cultural change. Cultural change means

driving within the speed limit, putting away the distractions, being alert to pedestrians and vehicles at every moment, and practicing defensive driving.

In a society and city that prides itself on being busy and always on the go, it can be hard to take a step back and remember to slow down. But that is what we have to do, with the support and assistance of law and policy.

I look forward to working with residents and community organizations in the 5th District to bring about the changed laws and changed habits needed to make the loss of life on our streets a thing of the past.

Quality-of-Life and Neighborhood Issues

In addition to the urgent needs of public safety, every neighborhood in the 5th District has everyday challenges effecting quality-of-life. This section focuses on some important citywide issues (such as road conditions) as well as just some of the specific challenges facing the 5th District's neighborhoods. This list is not comprehensive---many more challenges and issues could be listed. When elected, I will work with Council Liaison Amy Robins to compile an ongoing list of neighborhood challenges and a timeline for addressing them.

Jul 26: Fifty Fixes for the 5th #2: Pave the Potholes!

We asked, and residents of the 5th District answered!

A few weeks ago we issued a call for community feedback on our website on community issues in the 5th District. When we're out canvassing, we always ask folks **"so what's on your mind?"**

We hear a lot about schools, about economic opportunity, and about big policy questions. We also hear about trees, speeding cars, garbage collection, sidewalks, curb cuts and bus routes. In time, our **"Fifty Fixes for the Fifth"** series will address each of those important concerns.

But this week we have to focus on the most frequent neighborhood complaint our team hears when we knock doors and talk to 5th District residents: **potholes in our roads**. "I've had all four tires knocked out of alignment just by driving around here," one voter told us. Others talk of costly trips to the repair shop after hitting a pothole to repair damaged tires or worse.

Potholes are a safety issue, an economic issue, an equity issue, and a sustainability issue.

Safety: hitting potholes can damage cars and dodging potholes can cause accidents.

Economic: we need our key commercial districts like Carytown—districts that bring so much money to city coffers in the form of sales taxes and meals taxes—to be safe, attractive, and pothole-free. Yet a **recent service request** to RVA 311 reads “There has been a massive pothole at the end of the alley between Boulevard and Colonial....This pothole appears every year.” Another **service request filed on July 2nd** reported eight potholes on the block of S. Sheppard Street adjacent to Cary.

Equity: hitting a pothole is costly for everyone, but can be devastating for folks who can’t easily afford a car repair. For individuals and families striving to get ahead, an unlucky bump in the road can become a disruptive life event. That’s not fair, and is contrary to our aim of building a thriving city.

Sustainability: we need to continue progress towards becoming a multi-modal center. Roads in poor condition endanger cyclists. Improving cyclist and pedestrian safety are major concerns involving many inter-related issues, but road conditions are part of the picture.

The City administration **reports** that in the 5th District, 70.9% of our streets are “poor” or “fair,” significantly worse than the citywide average of 65%.

Incredibly, **all sixteen blocks of Cary Street between Thompson and Meadow are ranked as “poor” or worse.** On the Southside, while a few blocks of Midlothian and Semmes are classified as “satisfactory” or “good” the vast majority of connecting streets are “fair,” “poor,” or worse. So what is to be done?

The best approach—the “fix”-- is to improve the condition of our roads so that potholes become less common.

Importantly, in the FY 2020 adopted budget **\$15 million in new capital funding was appropriated for street maintenance.** The goal is to re-pave roads to make potholes less common. This major investment is a chance to make tangible progress, and if elected I will be asking questions and advocating aggressively **from day one** to be sure the **5th District is getting its fair share** of this spending, this year.

We also need to make sure RVA 311 as well as DPW is fully staffed, year-round. In fiscal 2018, the administration reported that nearly half—49%--of potholes requests are **more than three weeks old**. That number must come down significantly, and soon. (Happily, the July 2nd request to fill the eight potholes on S. Sheppard Street led to work being completed by July 23rd.)

As Council member I will advocate for investing in our infrastructure--and specifically our 5th District infrastructure—in a strategic and equitable fashion. It's crazy from any perspective that one of the signature, revenue-generating districts of the City (Carytown) has roads in such poor shape. All our neighborhoods need to have roads in better condition.

That means maintaining a long-term commitment to prioritizing infrastructure at budget time, and paying close attention to ground-level implementation. (Paving work needs to be done with high-quality materials to have the most lasting impact.) City Council took helpful action this week by passing an ordinance requiring the Department of Public Works to perform an annual assessment of the city's roads each year, so we can track progress over time.

Richmond's infrastructure needs are massive and, as with so many issues, it will take sustained, focus commitment to bring about the change we need. I am prepared to bring that focused commitment to City Council, on behalf of the 5th District and all of Richmond.

Housing Needs and Housing Policy

Secure housing is the foundation of a stable life, and meeting our community's housing needs is one of the major challenges facing the City of Richmond. This section focuses on how we can better meet our community's profound housing needs.

Fifty Fixes for the Fifth: Focus on Housing

Attention has been properly called this week to the housing crisis in our city, reflected in our high eviction rates. The crisis is partly about housing itself, but it's also symptomatic of the deeper problem of extraordinary poverty. **What's needed is better policy and a systematic strategy to build wealth and more affordable housing.**

I have been working on these issues for ten years, including co-authoring a [history of public housing](#) in Richmond for an academic journal. One of the first advocacy articles I wrote in Richmond concerned [Gilpin Court](#) and fighting against any proposal to redevelop it without a firm commitment to one-for-one replacement.

Working alongside housing advocates like Lillie A. Estes, we built one-for-one replacement of public housing into the core principles recommended by the [Mayor's Anti-Poverty Commission Report](#).

While director of the Office of Community Wealth Building in 2014, I worked with the Richmond City Health District (RCHD) to establish a Community Navigators program in each of the “big six” public housing communities with later folded into RCHD’s [Community Health Worker program](#) based in Resource Centers within each large public housing community. I also worked to find the funding and establish the program concept for the [Family Transition Coach](#) program in Creighton Court led by RCHD.

I worked to find the funding and launch the [BLISS](#) program of the Office of Community Wealth Building which works with families in public housing holistically to help them achieve greater economic self-sufficiency. And I led the development of a robust people-supporting plan as part of the [2016 HUD Choice application](#) in 2016, which if funded would have led to millions of dollars in federal investment in supporting education, employment, and health services for Creighton residents.

I have been doing the work to expand opportunities for public housing residents in various capacities for a decade, along with many other people. Obviously, as detailed below, it’s not enough—Richmond isn’t where it needs to be. And while there is always a place for protest against injustice, **real change comes through improving policy and finding the resources needed to implement them.**

Part of that work means understanding that our problems exist within a state and federal context. The federal government sets the rules and provides most of the resources for RRHA—resources which are vastly inadequate to meet our real needs, and which have been flat or declining for years. And yes, I have worked alongside leaders in these institutions who have sought to take on the enormous challenge of generating a program, plan, and resource base to improve our communities in an era of federal austerity for programs serving low-income communities.

I also have worked directly with public housing resident leaders in the shaping of these initiatives, and pushed for more resident voice, from increasing resident representation

on the RRHA board to supporting resident engagement in the Creighton Court process to establishment of the Maggie L. Walker Citizens Advisory Board. And in my personal life, I have worked intensively with individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness in cRichmond.

I share this to make it clear where I'm coming from on this set of issues, not to claim any success. For while we do have some success stories, we have not succeeded as a community. We have not generated the new resources needed at the scale needed to implement a people-centered strategy, and we have not come to terms with the fact that if we wish to make substantive change in a positive direction, we will need to come up with new resources on the same scale as our schools needs—hundreds of millions of dollars.

We cannot romanticize the status quo. Our public housing units are in dire condition, and [data shows](#) that Richmond is one of the worst places in America to grow up if you are low-income. I do believe we as a community must find a different, better model of affordable and low-income housing, and we must do so in a people-centered process. Below are *some* of the steps we must take as a community.

31. Develop a Comprehensive, Citywide Housing Plan

Following the recommendation of many community leaders, in 2018 the Stoney Administration, with City Council approval, established a stand-alone Department of Housing and Community Development, split off from the Department of Economic Development. One motivation behind this reorganization was to elevate the level of policy attention given to the housing sector.

Now in fall 2019, visible progress in meeting the community's housing needs is hard to find. (The City hasn't even updated its website to reflect a departmental reorganization that took place more than a year ago.) And we need look no further than this week's news to worry that we may be going backward as a community in meeting our profound housing needs.

The Department of Housing and Community Development needs to produce and present a comprehensive housing plan for our city's needs, **and it also need to drive the City's relationship with RRHA.** Whatever the bureaucratic rationale, the [initiating eviction proceedings against 52 Creighton Court households this week by RRHA](#) was a terrible event for our community. The City's new eviction diversion

program was established precisely to avoid circumstances like these, yet the RRHA did not commit to participating in the program prior to moving forward.

We can't build the community trust needed to build wealth, build safer communities, or even think about pursuing positive redevelopment of our aging public housing communities when residents reasonably fear that the real intent (or result) of any new policy is mass removal. We need the City of Richmond to take a people-centered approach to anything we do impacting low-income communities, and we need RRHA to be fully aligned with that approach.

We need a comprehensive housing plan appropriate for a growing city, aimed both at facilitating growth and improving affordability. That strategy should encompass construction of new units at all income levels. It also must involve improvements in permitting processes, promoting more high-density development through zoning modifications, making inclusion of affordable housing mandatory in new developments, and consideration of entirely new strategies such as promoting and supporting a "tiny house" sector in Richmond. Because housing affordability is a function of income as well as housing cost, we also must boost investment in strategies to help more residents bolster their incomes such as the workforce programs of the Office of Community Wealth Building.

But it also needs very specific steps to facilitate new housing development and help offset the impact of gentrification: hence, items 32-34 below.

32. Expand Affordable Housing Trust Fund and Expand Maggie L. Walker Community Land Trust

The City of Richmond does have two relatively new policy tools that can help in both accelerating development of affordable housing and in making sure that existing units are kept affordable long-term.

Community land trusts in effect de-commodify urban land, by taking such land off the market indefinitely. Instead of being owned by a private, profit-making entity, it's held by a nonprofit community organization. Residents of properties located within the land trust may garner a limited equity gain over time, but cannot sell such properties on the private market; instead, the property is returned to the land trust.

The land trust strategy—pioneered in [Burlington, Vermont](#) under Mayor Bernie Sanders—offers real promise in preserving affordability in our neighborhoods. The

[Maggie L. Walker Community Land Trust](#) can't grow fast enough, in my estimation. As a Council member I will support its growth and encourage it to grow a presence in the 5th District.

The Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which received funding for the first time in 2014, needs to grow in scale in order to have a more meaningful impact on the market. I will support increased investment in the Trust Fund combined with strong oversight measures to be sure funds are being used in a timely and effective way to leverage expanded private investment in affordable housing (including units at 30%, 60%, and 80% of Area Median Income).

33. Move tax delinquent properties back on the tax rolls

This is straightforward, but requires persistent attention. The City needs to devote more staff time and resources to moving the thousands of tax-delinquent properties back on to the market, effectively expanding the supply of available housing and helping alleviate upward price pressure on property values.

34. Protect the most vulnerable from the impact of gentrification through targeted tax relief programs.

We need to be sure more seniors are accessing the existing [property tax relief program](#)—a report earlier this year indicated [only a small minority of eligible Richmond residents](#) are accessing the program. The City administration must invest in greater outreach to spread the word about this program; I will do my part as a City Council member to be sure every eligible 5th District resident access the program.

I also support use of more nuanced taxation tools to assure that long-time homeowners are inoculated from the effect of rising property values, including capping annual property assessment increase for long-term homeowners. Residents who have invested decades of their life in helping Richmond make it through some tough times should not be forced out.

35. Develop a community-wide plan for the future of public housing

Public housing residents are among the most vulnerable members of our community, and public housing communities have long been neglected and isolated, to devastating effect.

Our priority as a community should be to work together to improve living conditions and to improve options (including housing options) for residents in public housing.

I have stood in support of public housing resident opposing mass eviction in Richmond for over ten years dating back to my public opposition to previous plans to redevelop Gilpin Court in 2009, by assuring that the Mayor's Anti-Poverty Commission Report and subsequent policy-making committed to one-to-one replacement of housing units.

I do believe that public housing in Richmond should be thoughtfully redeveloped, according to a progressive, inclusive process that a) expands options and opportunities for residents; b) assures that no resident is left worse off; and c) assures that the supply of available low-income housing in greater Richmond is not reduced.

The City of Richmond is one of the worst 2% of county units in the United States to grow up if you are low-income, in terms of fostering upward social mobility. I refuse to romanticize the status quo. And I recognize that RRHA has declining capacity to maintain the units it owns, meaning the quality and safety of the units will continue to deteriorate.

But I also recognize that without firm guarantees, redevelopment could potentially make things worse for some households. As I have documented in scholarly work about the history of public housing in Richmond, our community has a long history of redevelopment processes causing harm to poor, African-American communities. The Blackwell project is a recent example. Future developments must clearly break with past practice.

So I support the following four principles:

1. One-to-one replacement of redeveloped public housing units;
2. Guaranteeing every current resident a subsidized, quality unit at end of process;
3. Strong support via case management and related supports to all residents impacted by a redevelopment process as early in the process as possible; and
4. Strong resident participation in the change process.

Each of those principles correspond to the requirements of HUD's Choice Neighborhoods Initiative program.

I do not think maintaining the status quo in our larger public housing communities in Richmond is a progressive position. In fact, it is tantamount to preserving the legacy of deliberate segregation which created our model of public housing. The progressive position is to craft a strategy for change that protects the well-being of current residents, assures that the supply of low-income housing in Richmond does not decline, provides support to residents at each stage of the change process, and ultimately allows most or all residents to access improved living conditions.

Here are three needed elements of that strategy:

Internal improvement: In 2016, the RRHA received a score from HUD of 1/8 for its demonstrated capacity to execute a project like the Creighton Court transformation. RRHA needs an organizational and cultural overhaul, using a people-centered mindset. It has major work to do to become a better-performing organization and to establish vital trust with residents. Doing this work should be RRHA's top priority at this time.

Communication and Transparency: RRHA historically has done a very inadequate job of communicating with neighbors concerning what's going on, in real time. A culture of minimal communication needs to be replaced with a culture of over-communication and responsiveness.

Community wide discussion of the future of public housing: One regret from my time as a staff member of the Office of Community Wealth Building is that we were compelled to shelve a community engagement plan aimed at identifying and building wide public support and buy-in for *policy principles concerning public housing redevelopment*, in order to focus attention on the Creighton Court project. The service providers working group that the Office of Community Wealth Building convened in 2015-16 did agree to several core principles, principles which informed the work on the Creighton people plan.

(This was principle one, adopted by the group in 2015: "As public agencies, service providers, community organizations, community researchers, and community leaders involved in the development of the Creighton Court People Plan, we affirm that enhancing the well-being and capability development of all Creighton Court residents and surrounding community members is our top priority. A successful People Plan must engage and empower residents, and must account for the needs of all residents,

throughout the entire redevelopment process, with a minimum aim of assuring no residents are left worse off and a positive goal of providing as many residents as possible meaningful opportunities to pursue their goals and improve their quality-of-life.”)

Here's the problem: the larger community still hasn't been part of the difficult conversation we need to have, to answer some basic questions: what do we want the future of low-income housing in Richmond to look like? How can we bring about change while making sure no one is made worse off? How can we bring greater resources into our public housing communities as an essential part of this process? How can we engage and empower residents throughout the process? And how do we garner the resources needed to implement a strategy?

Those are the key questions we must ask as a community, through front-end engagement process, and before anything new related to redevelopment happens in Richmond. Let's be honest: the unsuccessful CHOICE Planning Grant submitted by RRHA for Gilpin Court this summer was [scored 41/102](#).

HUD does not think Richmond has its act together, does not think RRHA's resident engagement is close to adequate, does not think there is true community buy-in, and is not about to give Richmond substantial dollars any time soon. (We have actually taken a step backward since the 2016 Creighton Choice application, in my estimation.)

We need to stop and have the open community-wide conversation about what we are doing and why and how we will do it. RRHA is part of that conversation, but so is the City of Richmond (agencies and elected officials), so are public housing residents, and so is the wider community. I have in mind multiple facilitated dialogues aimed at developing a set of core policy principles which then could be voted for adoption by the relevant governing bodies (most importantly, City Council). Those adopted principles should become the lens by which the City and RRHA operate, as well as the lens by which the public holds government entities accountable for its actions and inactions.

That's the next step we need, in 2020.

#

Item #35 focuses largely on public housing redevelopment. But we must recognize redevelopment is a long-term process and that thousands of residents will continue to live in existing public housing for years to come.

That's why the RRHA must do everything within its power to improve service delivery, maintenance, and support for the existing public housing stock, and to support the needs of its residents. This is its duty, and as a Council representative when 5th District RRHA residents are not receiving due services or are having needs neglected, I will stand with them and demand accountability and action.

Statements on Navy Hill

Navy Hill has quite obviously been the hot-button issue in this race, and understandably so. The Mayor has chosen to bring forward a proposal that would transform downtown and also create financial obligations impacting the city for the next generation. Citizens rightly are demanding that City Council take a tough look at this proposal.

As an academic, in my own work I make a habit of triple-checking everything, and being the toughest critic on my own work. As a City Council member, I will bring that same temperament to an issue like this: I won't simply accept numbers on a paper as evidence, I'll demand to know the source of the numbers, the methods by which they were calculated, and the assumptions that were made.

I had hoped and expected earlier in the summer that Council's review process would have advanced to the point where I could make a fully informed, responsible decision concerning this project. But delays in the review process mean that both City Council's review and the work of the Navy Hill Development Advisory Commission will continue through December. The independent analyst that Council is hiring to conduct an independent review has not yet been identified.

I want the entire established process to run its course before committing to a final position. This is not because I don't understand the skepticism and frustration of many of the proposal's critics, and it's not because I'm trying to hide the ball. It's because I believe this is the proper way to do public policy: collect all the information possible, allow proponents to make their case, have lots and lots of questions asked, and evaluate the responses.

Some voters and community members may be under the impression that this election will "decide" the outcome of the Coliseum deal. This is not true. **To pass the deal on the table would need seven votes, not just five. It would need the buy-in of a large segment of the community, buy-in that is clearly now lacking.**

I won't vote for a project that doesn't have community buy-in and isn't demonstrably positive for the community. But I also won't reject a proposal that could bring needed investment and employment to our city center without completing a full evaluation. If the plan is flawed, we need as a community to understand exactly what those flaws are,

so that we as a community can learn from those flaws the next time we consider an economic development proposal.

I will do my homework on Council—both analyzing the deal in detail personally according to criteria laid out below, and making sure that 5th District residents have as many opportunities as needed to engage project leaders, in structured, moderated conversations. Either a consensus will build around the merits of this project (one way or another), or we will have a clearer sense of what the risks and trade-offs of proceeding are. Either way, it will be a more fully informed decision.

From the beginning of this campaign, many have assumed I'm just a yes vote on this project. Yes, I'm willing to consider it, because I know the urgency of addressing poverty and because I want to reverse decades of private and public disinvestment in this city.

But no, I'm not committed to the idea that this particular project is the best or only way to move our city forward. In fact, if elected I will pick up will Parker Agelasto left off by asking hard, detailed questions aimed at eliciting information and data and unearthing assumptions driving the proposal.

It is true that I see potential positive elements in the proposal, compared to many previous economic development efforts in Richmond. There is an effort to foreground employment and contracting opportunities for City residents, and there is an effort to protect taxpayers from open-ended risk.

That does not at all mean I think it's good enough, in its current form. For instance, I will not vote for any project that does not include a Project Labor Agreement, and the provisions around hiring City residents need to be strengthened. We need a serious conversation about how the project, if it proceeded, could actually broaden ownership and assets. It needs to be unconditionally assured that funding for schools is not harmed at any point in the project.

If the developers are not able to accommodate modifications like these—and possibly many more—then the deal won't get seven votes, and it won't get my vote.

Most critically, all of the numbers and data in the deal, as well as underlying assumptions, need to be unearthed, unpacked, and scrutinized, by independent analysts.

Neither those who are already persuaded of the project's merits nor those who have already concluded it's a bad deal should have anything to fear from completing the public process already underway. A fully informed decision makes for a better decision.

Below are my key statement related to the Navy Hill proposal from July to October. While my thinking (and questions) concerning the project have evolved as new information—and new concerns—have emerged, my five bedrock evaluative proposals remains the same.

Five Progressive Standards for Economic Development Policy (July 2019)

Richmond has a 24.4% poverty rate. That means that (leaving aside college students) about 45,000 people in our city are struggling to survive. We cannot become a thriving City, or a thriving 5th District, if we don't change this reality.

In the absence of massive new federal or state funding, which no one expects, or tax increases, which no one wants, the only realistic way for the city to change this reality is through **equitable economic development: economic development that expands living wage employment, ownership opportunities, and viable pathways to the middle class.**

The key question is, "how?"

I believe a sound, holistic economic development policy must focus on the fundamentals: education, workforce development, infrastructure, transportation, and efficient, consistent local government. Localities strong in these areas attract new people and private investment as a matter of course.

In Richmond we must also make an intentional, explicit effort to include those who have been excluded from decades of economic growth. With the winds of growth pushing the City to ever new heights, **now is the time** to establish rigorous, progressive standards that assure that all residents genuinely benefit. This means guaranteeing that historically excluded groups have equitable access to jobs and contracts, and that where feasible we develop social enterprise, cooperatives, and other business mechanisms that broaden pathways to wealth.

That's why I endorse rigorous, progressive standards that assure that all residents genuinely benefit from large economic development deals (sometimes known as

public-private partnerships). We can set these standards from a position of aspiration, not desperation. Richmond does not have to and must not accept lopsided deals that fail to address our community's needs.

Here are the five standards I would apply to any economic development project as a member of City Council:

Five Progressive Standards for Public-Private Economic Development Deals in Richmond

1. **Living Wage Jobs.** Richmond city residents, including those currently unemployed, under-employed, or in low-wage jobs should be first in line to get many of the jobs generated by the project. Those jobs must pay a living wage (ideally \$15/hr or higher). This cannot be an empty promise or a vague hope, but rather an iron-clad commitment. (The city's Office of Community Wealth Building and designated partners are well-positioned to play a lead role in connecting city residents to the opportunities and to provide needed trainings, certifications, and other supports.)
2. **Minority Contracts.** A robust percentage of contracts in the project (ideally 40%) must go to minority-owned businesses—and where feasible to social enterprises (from cooperatives to B-Corporations).
3. **Affordable Housing.** If new housing units are planned, a substantial percentage of those units must be designated as affordable for city residents, meaning affordable for those with income below 60% of the area median income (not the more common 80% standard).
4. **Transparency.** The proposal and its mechanics must be transparent so that citizens can understand its structure, and its risks and benefits. Importantly, any taxpayer liability must also be transparent, under both the worst case scenario and the most probable scenario. This means that projected benefits must be rigorously and independently scrutinized. It also means that projects must not impede the ability of the City to invest in urgent community needs such as school facilities.
5. **Public Support.** The proposal should have demonstrated support from a broad cross-section of the community.

In addition, wherever feasible, a robust **community benefits agreement** should also be part of major projects. Community benefits agreement (common in other localities) help assure that communities in proximity to or impacted by the proposal share in the benefits created by the project.

Proposals that fail to meet these criteria must be revised, and if revision is not possible, they should be rejected. No project can be perfect, but any project worth committing scarce public dollars to must demonstrably be in the public interest, and specifically in the interest of economically excluded residents.

Richmond is a growing city. We are now at the point where we as a community can set rigorous terms for how development ought to proceed. We have the opportunity in the next decade to harness investments in our city in the service of equity, fighting poverty and building community wealth.

That means setting a clear bar. It means being open to exploring possibilities and if they make sense, going forward. And it means also being willing to walk away if a particular proposal doesn't make sense.

If elected to City Council,

1. I will **ask the hard questions** of any project put to City Council.
2. I will **listen attentively** to the questions posed by district residents, Council colleagues, and the broader public.
3. I will **support projects that are demonstrably in the public interest**, and specifically in the interest of economically excluded residents, and reject projects that are not.
4. When it comes time for an ultimate decision, I will **publicly explain my position and the reasoning** behind my vote on any contested project.

These are my commitments to the residents and voters of the 5th District. I believe the principles articulated here are rigorous but reasonable, and if applied conscientiously can help us distinguish projects worth doing from projects to avoid.

Updated Navy Hill Assessment (September 20)

Background

The proposed Navy Hill development is a matter of a great interest and concern to voters in the 5th District and citywide. It's important for its own sake, and because it raises fundamental issues about how economic development projects in Richmond should proceed, now and in the future. The City of Richmond has a positive obligation to use its powers to assure that all projects benefit the public interest with priority given to broadening employment and ownership opportunities for residents who have long been excluded from the economic pie.

That's why I released a detailed statement of economic development principles back in July focused on employment, housing, minority contracting, taxpayer transparency, and public buy-in. After the formal release of the Navy Hill proposal in early August, I committed to reviewing and providing my provisional assessment of the proposal's pros and cons by September 20. Publication of this document today fulfills that pledge.

This statement contains my initial review as well as critical questions, outlined in two parts. In [Part One](#), I begin with a couple of top-line statements and my current position on the proposal. In [Part Two](#), I provide some details from my read of the project as well as outstanding issues and questions that I believe must be addressed by the administration and project proponents.

[Part One](#)

There have been several developments in the last few weeks that significantly affect the viability of the project.

- 1) The Navy Hill Advisory Commission has yet to be fully seated or to begin its work. This delay is significant because this Commission has been charged by City Council with the task of formal scrutiny of the proposal.
- 2) The controversy concerning ghostwritten editorials supporting the project has further undermined public trust in the project and cast doubt on whether there will be a fair public discussion of the project's merits.

3) Most significantly, former Chief Administrative Officer Selena Cuffee-Glenn had acted as the point person in negotiating the Navy Hill project. Her termination this week by the Mayor raises major questions about the project's viability in the near term.

Here's why:

- City Council and the larger public needs to know who the "point person" for this project will be – the person who can be reasonably expected to know and understand the details as well as to explain why certain provisions are in the public interest.
- City Council and the larger public needs to know who will be directly responsible for oversight and monitoring of this entire project, should it be adopted and move into implementation.
- In my judgment, the most urgent task facing this administration right now is to secure a highly competent professional administrator to help the organization reach a higher level of effectiveness. Investing energy in moving forward with this deeply controversial proposal at this time will detract from the more fundamental task of getting the administration on track and assuring a successful transition to the next CAO.

Part Two

While we await the outcome of the issues outlined in Part One, it is still relevant to assess the project details based on the information that is currently available.

Key elements of the proposal include:

- The Economic Development Authority, on behalf of the City, would sell bonds to build a new arena (at total cost to the public of \$476 million).
- At the same time, private investors would commit to \$1.3 billion in private investment in the adjacent area for a hotel, housing units, commercial activities, and other amenities. This development would primarily occur in an area of downtown is currently generating little (to zero) tangible revenue.
- A July 1, 2019 benchmark would be established based on the tax assessment value of a much wider, 80-block area inclusive of the Coliseum area, an area that currently contains both non-taxable property and private development. This is the "increment financing district."

- Tax revenue collected on the property value assessed on July 1, 2019 would continue to be directed to the city's budget as is currently in place.
- The "incremental" increase in property value after the benchmark date of July 1, 2019 becomes the basis for an additional pool of tax revenue – this "incremental" tax revenue (over and above the benchmark) would be directed toward repayment of the loans.
- Proponents claim that the resultant economic activity will not only pay back the cost of the arena, but generate major, ongoing new revenue streams for the City of Richmond, as well as bring jobs, housing opportunities, business opportunities, and other benefits to downtown, a public "profit" stream that would begin to appear within five years, and totaling nearly \$1 billion over 30 years. Even subtracting the growth in the tax increment area projected to happen even without the project, the net new revenue generated by the project is estimated at \$750 million over 30 years.

These claims must be scrutinized and objectively assessed.

My Assessment

I have previously stated my criteria for assessing economic development projects in the City of Richmond:

- 1) Creation of living wage jobs for Richmond residents
- 2) Capacity to add the supply of affordable housing in Richmond
- 3) Commitment to minority contracting
- 4) Commitment to transparency as to taxpayer liability (and related financial questions)
- 5) Significant public support

While the proposal does make a tangible effort to address most of these issues, it's unclear in the current documents that the plan goes far enough or that it can be reasonably expected to reach the financial viability that is claimed. A couple of important examples:

Example #1: The documents state a commitment to coordinating with the Office of Community Wealth Building to conduct job fairs in all nine Council districts as well as in public housing communities. But there is simply not enough evidence presented to show that these steps are likely to produce success toward helping under-employed City residents find jobs. As the 5th District representative, I would insist upon further information and detail on the steps required to ensure progress toward this goal.

Example #2: Attention has been focused on the financial underpinnings of the proposal. The numbers presented by Davenport, the City's financial advisers, project that the project will generate a net financial surplus to the City, as long as it performs at 46% or higher of expectations. Understanding the basis of these numbers is critical to the evaluation of this project, because the promise of a significant positive revenue stream to potentially support our City's future needs is a primary promised benefit.

While a new Coliseum is a nice thing for a thriving City to have, it cannot be considered an urgent priority. Likewise, revitalizing the blocks and space around the Coliseum is a welcome prospect, but there are other areas of City with many more residents that also need revitalization and reinvestment (such as the Hull Street Corridor).

Similarly, the project involves other important public and private benefits (the GRTC transfer station, potentially a new Social Services building, a new hotel). But it's entirely possible those benefits could be derived in other (possibly superior) ways than this specific project.

In my judgment, there are two main cases to be made for doing this project.

The first is that it might create living wage jobs with benefits helping Richmond residents in poverty. That's why more information and detail on the employment pipeline component of the proposal is essential.

Second, proponents claim the project will produce a substantial addition to the tax base and generate significant new revenue that would not exist but for the project. But what is the basis for those numbers?

We, the members of the public, need to be shown the methodological basis by which each of these numbers has been estimated, especially the first (total projected revenue) and the last (the estimate of what might happen in the area without the project). The estimates provided and the assumptions behind them need to be scrutinized and independently verified by professional economists and analysts with no stake in the project.

Additionally, community members have raised an important question – could "organic" development also produce significant economic benefits? In other words: What is the

economic advantage of the large-scale “master plan” strategy versus a strategy of selling off smaller parcels of public property?

This is a fair question ... and it’s one that I will push aggressively in order to receive a direct response from the administration and the project backers.

Genuine Community Wealth Building

In the past few weeks of research, talking with residents throughout the 5th District as well as monitoring the public conversation, I have come to realize that there are additional fundamental questions that need to be addressed (in addition to those noted above):

- Who is benefiting from this project, in the long term, not just as employees or contractors, but as also as owners? What effort is being made to assure that the businesses, restaurants, and other commercial activities expected to be generated in the project area will be owned more broadly: by people of color, by local residents, by the employees themselves?
- The scale of investment is simply too large not to have a front-end conversation on how it could be used to build genuine community wealth—placing assets and ownership with a broader class of people than the usual “1%.”

In my view, any effort to bring this area of our City back with a public-private partnership should have an explicit reparations component ... it should include a deliberate effort to build black, locally-owned wealth, both in recognition of historic injustices and because that is exactly what is needed to build a more equitable Richmond.

- How will revenue surplus be managed and directed? We need to have a front-end conversation on designating the project “public profit” (revenue surplus) from the deal not just to City services in general, but to further investments in community wealth building (whether carried out by public or nonprofit agencies).
- What will be the broader community representation on the board of the Navy Hill District Corporation? We need to scrutinize this important question with a view toward the long term.

These are important questions for any project, but especially for a project bearing the Navy Hill name. Many community members, as well as my long-time friends, Ben Campbell and John Moeser, have provided poignant, forceful reminders of the legacy of neighborhood destruction of historic Navy Hill. I believe that we can start to address the injustices of the past with the right decisions for our future.

[Next Steps](#)

This statement and my observations about the Navy Hill project are far from comprehensive; many more specific questions have been raised and will need to be answered if the process moves forward. As this statement hopefully makes clear, I believe that the proposal has not yet earned the buy-in and support of the community, and it almost certainly cannot do so without significant changes. I am hopeful that the public will get firm answers to the questions posed here so we can evaluate the plausibility of the developers' claims with confidence.

I remain committed to sharing my research and concerns on this important issue with voters as well as engaging their feedback. And, I will release a full and firm statement no later than October 21 to update my position on the viability of the project.

When 5th District voters go to the polls on November 5th, they will know exactly where I stand on the proposal, why I take that position, and my recommendations for steps that can be taken to help Richmond realize its full potential.

Navy Hill Proposal: Final Campaign Statement (October 20, 2019)

The City of Richmond has a poverty rate of 25%. Nearly 34,000 working-age adults live in poverty, over 90% of whom do not have full-time jobs. Moreover, a significant portion of city land is held by non-taxable public entities; plus we have several blocks of non-productive land in the heart of downtown. Finally, the City is effectively barred from expanding through annexation.

For all of these reasons, it makes sense that the City of Richmond should explore options for bringing more economic activity downtown – creating more centrally located, living wage jobs accessible to City residents by transit, while adding to the tax base. Yet it's also understandable that many residents in the 5th District and citywide

distrust a complex proposal involving large amounts of money given the City's dubious track record with high-profile economic development "deals."

How then to proceed?

While we can't ignore the mistakes of the past, we also can't be defined and confined by them.

We need a clear-eyed approach that draws on the lessons of the past without allowing those failures to cause us to miss positive opportunities to move forward as a community.

Earlier in this campaign, I put forth five core principles of progressive economic development that I would apply to any proposed economic development deal involving City resources: 1) commitment to hire local residents at living wages, 2) commitment to robust minority contracting, 3) commitment to affordable housing, 4) transparency as to potential risks to the taxpayer, and very importantly 5) evidence of significant public buy-in to the project.

I followed up on that platform by issuing an interim statement on the proposal in late September, laying out my concerns and questions. I also promised to issue this final statement today, October 21, and I'm pleased to fulfill this commitment today.

Since September, the review process established by City Council to review the proposed Navy Hill development is up and running, and many substantive questions about the project are being addressed. Copious information, including [written responses to questions raised by City Council and at public meetings](#) are available on the City and [Navy Hill Development Advisory Commission](#) website; these are well worth reading for residents interested in the details of this project.

Meetings of the Navy Hill Development Advisory Commission are scheduled to run until December 14, in addition to planned public hearings. City Council also has work sessions on the project scheduled through November, and is expected to hire an independent analyst to review the project next month as well. A potential Council vote on the project is not likely to take place until early 2020.

At this relatively early point in the process, I believe it's irresponsible to take a firm position in favor or in opposition, for two reasons:

- There are far too many unanswered questions—both big-picture and detailed questions—to be a “yes.”
- There is too much potential opportunity in the proposal—for new investment, for employment, and for long-term fiscal benefit—to be a “no.”

My responsibility as a potential elected official is to make sure I am making factually informed, values-based votes about contested issues. I believe that we need to allow the review process to continue so that as many questions as possible can be asked and answered and so that the public has the fullest possible understanding of the deal.

This process is currently under way, and more and more details—beyond the glossy overview—are being unearthed. For instance (in part due to questions posed by Parker Agelasto at an October 7th Council work session), we now have available detailed year-by-year projections of revenues and debt service for the project under varying assumptions about future growth.

In addition to the five criteria stated previously, here’s what I’m looking for:

- Strong assurances and firmer evidence that projected revenue numbers hold up.
- Ironclad assurance that the deal will never have a negative net impact on the City’s contribution to RPS’s general fund or on funds available for school construction projects.
- A firm commitment to the use of Project Labor Agreements to assure fair treatment of labor and payment of family-sustaining wages in the construction process.
- In addition to prioritizing employment opportunities for local residents, there must be a firm commitment to assuring that the project also creates local ownership opportunities in businesses and restaurants anticipated as part of the project.
- We need to ensure that the public interest and our diverse community can be represented on the Navy Hill Foundation Board of Directors long term.

In short, we need to work through the process deliberately. If the proposal, or a modified version of it, is indeed a good deal to the public it should be possible for proponents to demonstrate that in a way that is persuasive to fair-minded people asking reasonable questions. *Unfortunately, that has not yet happened in a way that inspires strong public confidence in the project.*

My commitment to voters in the 5th District on this issue, should I be elected, is:

- I will meet with Parker Agelasto, who has been participating in the City Council review, for the purpose of garnering all of his observations and questions.
- I will call a community meeting immediately after taking office, during the first week of December, devoted to this topic. I will offer 5th District residents the opportunity to directly engage with project proponents. And I will schedule as many subsequent community meetings as required.
- I will push for changes that strengthen employment, affordable housing, and minority contracting provisions, and also minimize taxpayer risk.
- I will proactively keep 5th District residents informed throughout the continuing review process and will always listen to concerns and questions from residents.
- If the proposal moves forward to a Council vote while I am in office, I will continue to engage with 5th District residents and will detail the reasons for my final position.

While the Navy Hill proposal is an important question for our city, it's also important that we develop a healthy community decision-making process as a city wrestling with complex challenges. **Our most important goal should be to establish strong economic development standards that assure robust community benefits while minimizing (and making transparent) taxpayer risk.**

With that long view in mind, I have laid out in this campaign specific policy standards applicable to all economic development projects, and also enumerated several specific additional requirements of the Navy Hill proposal. I have also pledged specific actions to residents should I be elected as 5th District representative.

I believe this is the most responsible and transparent course of action for tackling this challenging issue. If elected, I know the attentive and engaged voters of the 5th District will hold me to it.

Together we will work to build a thriving 5th District and City of Richmond!

Doing the Work of City Council

City Council is a job! It's an important job with many different kinds of demands. I understand the job well because I have worked closely with Council members in my prior roles, and because I have had a front row seat to how Parker Agelasto has done the job the last 7 years. I know what the job is, and I know what it isn't. Read on for my detailed thoughts on the four critical components of City Council service.

Doing the Work of City Council, 1/4: Responsiveness to Residents

When I announced I was considering running for Richmond City Council in early May, I pledged I would listen to 5th District constituents closely concerning what kind of Council member they wish to see serve them. In this series of posts, I lay out both how I plan to do the job of serving on City Council and why I am uniquely qualified to be effective in each aspect of the role **from day one**.

The job of serving on City Council involves four main areas:

- *Responsiveness to Residents*
- *Policy Making and the Budget Process*
- *Holding the City Administration Accountable*
- *Being Present and Accessible in the Community*

All are important to 5th District residents and the City as a whole, and I am prepared and willing to do the work necessary to be successful in each part of the job.

In this post we'll focus on the most fundamental part of the job: being responsive to constituents and the community.

Responsiveness to Residents and the Community

Residents look to their City Council representative to be their liaison with city government. This means helping explain what's going on, it means listening to complaints, it means finding out answers, and it means thinking through how to get a problem solved when nothing else has worked.

Here's how I will go about this aspect of the job.

First, I will be accessible: by email, by telephone (I'll make my cell number public the first day in office), by Facebook messaging, and in person via walk-in community office hours and appointment. **5th District residents will know how to reach me.**

Second, I will work proactively to help residents understand what's going on at City Hall—both the day-to-day and the big picture.

I think it's important that residents understand what their City agencies do and how they do it, and I think it's important that the agencies interact with citizens on a regular basis.

That's why, in addition to holding regular **District-wide meetings and community office hours**, I also will work with the administration and other Council members to create a "Citizens Academy": an opportunity for citizens to take a deeper dive into the work of City Hall, in regular gatherings over the course of the year.

At each session, I will invite one or more agency directors to visit the 5th District and share what they are doing with citizens. Over the course of each year, we'll make sure that the key jobs of our City Government—Human Services, Public Safety, Economic Development and Planning, Community Wealth Building, Operations (including Public Works), and Finance & Administration are represented in these discussions with citizens.

I don't want the Citizens Academy to be "dog & pony shows" with canned information. Instead, I want them to be real dialogue that goes deep into the work our city agencies do while getting real feedback from citizens on that work. We'll also be sure to invite representatives from key partner agencies of the City such as RPS, RRHA and GRTC on at least an annual basis.

Third, I will share information about what's going at City Hall proactively with citizens: through the District Newsletter, through social media, through announcements during Council meetings, through District-wide meetings, and through visiting neighborhood association meetings.

Fourth, I will work with my Council Liaison to respond to questions and complaints as quickly as possible, in a professional and helpful manner. We will acknowledge every communication in a reasonable time frame, and if we can't

provide an immediate response to your question we'll let you know and then follow up when we have the needed information.

We'll work to help residents navigate the systems to get needs addressed in a timely way. We will encourage residents to use the established reporting systems for routine problems, but when that doesn't work we'll take the issue to the administration directly. I'll push the administration to address issues and shortcomings in the 311 system, and I'll prioritize funding and staffing for this critical function at budget time.

Finally, speaking of liaisons, the 5th District has been exceptionally well-served by Council Liaison Amy Robins, who is deeply knowledgeable about the district's needs as well as the workings of city government. ***If elected, my first call the morning after the election will be to Ms. Robins to ask her to continue in the position and work with me to serve the 5th District.***

Doing the Work of City Council, 2/4: The Budget Process and Policy Making

This week, Richmond Public Schools released the startling statistic that just [10% of our high school students are college or career-ready](#). National data indicates that the [City of Richmond is one of the worst 2% of counties in the United States](#) in which to grow up if your parents are low-income.

These data underscore the crisis in our communities and the urgency of making tangible change and progress. That's why from day one of this campaign I have said that bolstering education and fighting poverty—the two must go hand-in-hand—are my top priorities, and why [improving local government effectiveness](#) is critical to achieving those core goals.

It's all-too-easy to offer sideline critiques of the decisions made by our city government.

What's much harder—and much more important—is getting involved hands-on in moving more resources to where they are needed most: our kids and our neighbors in economic need.

I am the candidate in this race with a [track record of doing just that](#). As a community member and co-chair of the City's poverty-fighting initiative in 2013-14, I worked alongside Councilwoman Ellen Robertson and dozens of community members to get new investments in the city budget supporting after-school programs, early literacy, workforce development, housing, transportation and more, as well as to create the Office of Community Wealth Building (OCWB).

As a director of a city agency (OCWB), I saw the budget process from the inside: good, bad, and ugly. Many citizens do not realize that every year literally every agency has requests and needs cut by the administration's internal process. The administration is bound to present a balanced budget, and each year it tries to balance continuation and improvement of existing services, legal obligations, addressing potential threats to public safety, meeting the requests of schools, and undertaking new initiatives (be they mayoral priorities or community demands).

The needs in Richmond—for new schools, for better paid teachers, for more investments in fighting poverty and helping residents find pathways to prosperity, for expanding and improving the supply and quality of affordable housing—are large. The dollars available to meet those needs are too few. And much as we would all like the

state or the federal government to intervene and appear at the doorstep with many millions of new dollars, that is not likely to happen any time soon, and not all at once.

This is what it means to recognize Richmond is a structurally challenged city. We have more than our share of challenges, and way too small of a tax base to handle them.

This is a reality I have been grappling with over the last six years in my various roles engaged with Richmond local government. And while the process hasn't always been pretty, I have been able to work within the process to drive and achieve change:

- *Expanding funding for workforce development through the Office of Community Wealth Building (and then helping secure a state matching grant to double its budget)*
- *Providing City support for educational initiatives such as NextUp RVA (after school programs) and RVA Future Centers (helping students apply for college and scholarships)*
- *Developing the Education Compact which has led to more operating funding for RPS and more school construction funds*
- *Working with the Budget and Strategic Planning department to reform the City's external grant process for nonprofits to make sure funded programs are better aligned with the City's goals*
- *Working with Budget and Strategic Planning as well as all agencies to establish a new Performance Management unit*

What I have learned from this engagement is threefold: first, everything that is in the city budget, as it stands, is there for a reason. Every item in there is important to someone.

Second, too often not enough tough questions are asked about just *how* important particular items or programs are—either by the administration, or by City Council as a body.

Third, and most important, to make progress towards meeting our most important needs, we need to be very clear on our priorities, need to have a clear strategy for how to better meet those priorities over time, *and* we have to identify the specific action steps that can move us forward, using a skillful scalpel.

I believe that to truly improve our kids' likelihood of academic and career success and to create a thriving City, we have to invest more in kids and families, and we have to

move more aggressively to tackle poverty. To do this without raising taxes will require more economic development and a stronger tax base, as well as better stewardship of the resources we already have.

With respect to the annual budget process, I'll be asking three big questions, of every agency seeking money:

- *How important is the work of the agency or program to the city as a whole?*
- *What is the expected benefit or return from meeting the agency's request?*
- *How likely is the agency to be able to effectively execute on its priorities, if funded?*

Based on my experience and first-hand knowledge of city government, I can already point to five specific priorities that I believe are under-funded and would generate significant benefit from increased funding: early childhood education, workforce development (which must continue to grow in scale), the permitting process, [investments in roads and sidewalks](#), and investment in the city's own Performance Management unit.

This list is not exhaustive. But it shows that we need to be investing in people, investing in our infrastructure, investing in economic growth, and attending to the city's internal organizational needs—all at the same time.

The Performance Management office is potentially the key piece to this puzzle. [That unit needs to be properly funded](#) so that it can both ask the hard questions internally and assess and identify opportunities for saving and efficiencies within the agencies. The annual budget process is the most important single thing City Council does. I am prepared on December 1, 2019 to weigh in on the FY 2020 budget on equal footing with other Council members, and indeed the added benefit of my administrative experience.

Prior to the FY 2020 budget proposal being announced, I will share with the administration both my citywide and my district-specific priorities, and I will make public what I share with them.

Once the budget proposal is published I will study the documents closely as well as the presentations to Council made by each agency, and I will prepare detailed questions for the administration and its component agencies concerning what they did (and did not) fund. I know how to ask hard questions, and the questions I have asked behind

closed doors in previous roles I will be more than happy to ask in a public setting as a Council member thoroughly vetting the proposed budget.

I will work constructively with other colleagues to build consensus on needed amendments to the Mayor's proposed budget. And I will explain my reasoning and final positions to 5th District residents, in detail.

The same priorities, attention to detail, and commitment to explaining my votes I will apply to the budget process as 5th District Representative, I will apply to other policy questions as well.

But as this discussion already shows, the budget and policy process can't be separated from the question of how well the administration is actually executing on its priorities. That leads us to the subject of the next post: holding the Administration accountable.

[Doing the Work of City Council, 3/4: Holding the Administration Accountable](#)

In the [previous post](#), I talked in detail about the City's budget process and the need for a strategic approach based on clear priorities and a willingness to ask tough questions, of all agencies.

In this post, I discuss the third critical component of serving on City Council: Holding the Administration accountable for performance and execution, using monies allocated to achieve specified ends.

The budget process and accountability are closely linked. If agencies don't present clear plans for what they are going to do with the money they request, they shouldn't get full funding.

But even if an agency does provide a clear plan and does get the funding requested, we have to track and assess what was actually done with the allocated money and whether the program or agency achieved the promised or desired results.

My experience as a former director of an agency (the Office of Community Wealth Building) and as a senior policy advisor charged with helping develop performance management plans for *all* City agencies gives me a unique perspective on this challenge. Those experiences have yielded three critical insights:

First, government, including Richmond city government, does not have to be defined by failure and dysfunction. It's possible to get important things done.

We got a lot of things done in a short period time during my two-year tenure as director of the Office of Community Wealth Building, from staffing the agency to launching or expanding six programs to supporting massive citywide initiatives; those specifics are documented elsewhere (see this [previous post](#) for some highlights).

One of my favorite examples of success is the RVA Future Center program, launched in the fall of 2015 and going into its fifth year this upcoming academic year. In the fall of 2014 we developed a joint City of Richmond/RPS committee to examine the idea of launching an intentional effort to help more RPS students access career and college opportunities. Funding for the program was put into the budget for fiscal 2016, and the money become available on July 1, 2015.

Just two months later, in September, the program opened in dedicated spaces in all five comprehensive high schools, with Center directors in place in each school and a citywide program manager. Office of Community Wealth Building staff drove this process forward in collaboration with RPS leadership and the RPS Education Foundation. Working as a team, we laid out a specific program concept, established clear timelines to guide action steps, identified and overcame organizational and logistical barriers, and pushed the work through in the summer of 2015 with a sense of urgency.

When the program had its first public event in December 2015 at Armstrong High School, then-Secretary of Education Anne Holton attended the launch [and lauded our efforts as a model of effective cooperation](#) between the City of Richmond and RPS.

She was right. That effort shows that where there is a will and sufficient cooperation, public efforts can move effectively, in real time.

Second, the reason success stories like the quick, proficient launch of RVA Future are more the exception than the rule in City Hall is that too many core internal processes in City Hall don't work well. So if we want to see performance and execution improve systemically across all the agencies, we need to pay close attention to improving the internal services that allow agencies to hire people, buy things, pay for things, and communicate in a timely way.

Third, city agencies do have clear plans, internally. But they are not generally held publicly accountable for executing on those plans: that is for following through and delivering on what they promised to do at budget time.

Here's a key reason why: the public (including Council) hasn't been shown those plans. When I worked in the Mayor's Office in 2017, I worked with Budget and Strategic Planning staff to develop a template for reporting on each agency's annual goals and objectives, in detail; the Chief Administrative Officer then directed each agency to complete the requested information.

Once those plans were developed, I along with the CAO met with the heads of each portfolio to review the plans, and we then shared our assessment of progress with the Mayor.

Out of that body of work emerged the Performance Management Office, which is charged with assessing the performance of all agencies and making recommendations for ongoing organizational improvement.

While I am proud of the work I participated in and know that there have been numerous improvements and gains under the current Mayor, **I am not satisfied with the progress of the administration in pushing performance improvements forward.** Specifically, there are still too many systemic challenges in the internal services which have not been addressed, and the administration to date has failed to share with the public the internal agency plans.

Making those plans public would begin to change the equation. The very act of committing to achieve specific objectives, and publicizing that commitment, should motivate agencies to perform. If the Council and the larger public never gets a clear view of all the things an agency was supposed to have accomplished in a given year, it has little hope of holding its leadership and staff accountable for its use of resources.

The administration must discipline its agencies to ask these questions:

- *What are the agency's core responsibilities and goals?*
- *What are the action steps that will achieve those goals?*
- *What resources are needed to implement those action steps in a successful manner?*
- *Who are the people specifically responsible for seeing those action steps are taken?*
- *What specific targets will be achieved, within various time frames (1 year, 5 years)?*
- *How will progress be evaluated and assessed, and what process is in place to allow mid-course correction if need be?*

The answers to those questions should be shared with City Council and public. Publicizing this information would both help citizen better understand the work of their agencies and also would set a clear bar for holding agencies accountable.

I know that good work can be done in local government, even though even the most successful projects rarely go exactly to plan. That's why on City Council, I will have little patience for excuses for inaction or failing to get done what was promised. I will ask agency directors at budget time and committee meetings to explain exactly what is going on and why or why not targets are being met.

That's the same standard I held myself and the staff of the Office of Community Wealth Building to when I was a director. Indeed, I insisted that the ordinance making the Office a permanent city agency include a requirement of a detailed [annual written report](#), delivered each year by the Mayor to City Council.

At the same time, however, I will appreciate the need to address the underlying organizational challenges that often lead to projects taking too long, stalling altogether, or simply failing. That means demanding the administration address its problem areas, and it also means being willing to put a much higher priority on internal organizational needs at budget time.

Agencies that get City funding must be accountable to the public for the use of funds and for fulfilling their key missions. As a City Council member, I will ask the hard questions of each agency. Those that don't provide adequate answers for disappointing progress will fall down the pecking order in budget season.

Likewise, the Mayor and the administration as a whole must be held accountable for making progress on articulated goals. The language of "One Richmond" must be met with a multitude of concrete actions, strategically designed to advance an equitable city, in the arenas of education, housing, workforce development, transportation, and more. And those specific action steps must be executed in a timely, careful, detail-oriented manner, to have maximum impact.

The City of Richmond is capable of doing great work in a timely way. But far too often, it does not. We cannot reach our potential as a city so long as that's the case.

As a Council member representing the 5th District, I will draw on my administrative and organizational experience both to hold agencies accountable for dollars allocated, and to push for organization-wide improvement. That's what District residents—the local

taxpayers—expect, and it’s what we all need if the community as a whole is to move forward over the next decade.

Doing the Work of City Council, 4/4: Being Present and Accessible, in the Community

We now come to the final, critical component of doing the work of City Council: **Being present and accessible in the community.** As noted in the [very first post in this series](#), the City Council representative is the connecting point between residents and their city government. And a big part of Council leadership, or leadership at any level, is listening and learning.

This is especially true in the 5th District, with its distinct neighborhoods and racial and economic diversity. It’s not good enough to be just a few places; citizens rightly expect their representative to be “everywhere,” or at least as many places as possible.

I know this community. I am an RPS parent whose child attended John B. Cary Elementary School; my spouse served on the PTA Board, and I have sponsored class trips and been honored to serve as John B. Cary’s [commencement speaker](#) this past June.

I was a volunteer basketball coach at Randolph Community Center for five seasons (I’ve also coached John B. Cary’s team and at Humphrey Calder), and have mentored neighborhood youth. I was invited last December to speak on behalf of the neighborhood at the 95th anniversary of Sixth Baptist Church.

Just in the past week I helped open a new [community library](#) at Randolph Community Center sponsored by the Fountain for Youth Foundation, and was invited by the [TH-JAW Foundation](#) to address the city’s five high school football teams in advance of the upcoming season.

I walk around Byrd Park all the time and live the bulk of my daily life outside of work in our amazing Fifth District. I like going to school events, recreational sports events, arts and cultural events, and more.

As Fifth District representative, I pledge to be present and accessible. I will attend as many neighborhood association meetings as possible and be sure we have staff present at meetings I cannot get to personally. I will visit each school in the district each semester, and I will regularly be present at recreational activities taking place in

the district. You'll see my family at the Randolph pool and you'll see me shooting baskets.

As [previously stated](#), I will continue to hold district meetings and also hold additional "Citizen Academies" focused on fostering direct dialogue between city agencies and Fifth District residents.

And sometimes, I will just walk around the neighborhoods to say hello, see what's going on, and find out what's on people's minds. I enjoy talking to people, but even more I enjoy listening to people share their stories, their insights, their recommendations.

Listening is the biggest part of leadership. Residents who want to reach out to me and talk will know where to find me—and also will know that soon enough, I will be coming through for a meeting, an occasion, or just to check in.

Of course, I intend to see as many residents and voters in the 5th District as possible between now and Election Day. If you live in the 5th District and I come knocking, please do answer—I would be thrilled to talk to you. But know also I'll be back through, time and again, for as long as I may have the privilege of representing the 5th District on City Council.

Conclusion

There are many good candidates in this race, and I am proud of the spirit in which this campaign has been waged by all parties.

I absolutely believe I have the strongest qualifications, experience and capacity to do all parts of the job and help our district and city thrive. I am a tenured professor and a nationally recognized policy expert. I also have experience building a successful agency within Richmond City Hall as well as leading many related partnerships to bring about real change. This work has already benefited thousands of Richmonders in hands-on practical ways. I've helped get resources into schools and I've worked on improving policy and process in City Hall. As this series of blog posts and policy statements shows, I have a thorough command of local policy issues.

This is a truly unique profile (not just locally, but nationally). I am ready to begin making positive impact on behalf of the progressive changes 5th District residents have made

abundantly clear they wish to see in our city, starting December 1 and going into the upcoming budget cycle.

I want to assure this upcoming year that workforce development programs expand into the 5th District, that funding for a new George Wythe High School is identified and committed, and that we fully fund our schools' needs—not down the road, but this year. I want to press the administration to follow through on its promises of delivering a more transparent, better managed city government. I have the policy knowledge to identify good ideas and solutions to tough problems, but I also have the relationship-building skill needed to build consensus for action.

I didn't enter this race to start a political career; the focus of my energy is solely on improving the 5th District and the City of Richmond. I have a vision, forged in community with others, of a community with much less poverty, much stronger schools, and a much more effective government. I have had the privilege to build towards that vision and accomplish some important things for the community in previous roles.

I'm running now because there is so much more to be done to create a more equitable Richmond, building on previous positive steps. I know already that this work is hard, exhausting, often frustrating, sometimes disappointing. It takes relentless hard work to get important things done, and even then success is often fragile.

But this is critically important work, and it must be done. If elected you will see how hard I work, how carefully I consider problems, and how committed I am to taking the actions that push progress forward. Those who have worked with me will tell you that while my style is not the most polished, it is the most persistent, and it is very effective.

I do what it takes to get the job done, no matter the obstacles or pressures.

I will do a great job for the residents of the 5th District. I am incredibly excited about the opportunity to serve in this role. It's my passion for doing the work of the City of Richmond and using my knowledge and experience to further help our community that has driven me forward in this campaign.

That's why I am asking for your vote on November 5.

Help us elect experienced, diligent, and conscientious leadership to Richmond City Council, and help us build a Thriving Fifth District.