



GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

GBC's 2020 Baltimore City Election Coverage Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: TJ SMITH (D)

The Greater Baltimore Committee has identified key policy priorities to drive discussion in the 2020 Citywide Elections. The priorities are:

1. Prioritize enhanced coordination across criminal justice agencies and support evidence-based crime reduction strategies to improve public safety.
2. Implement strategic and inclusive economic development strategies to attract and retain businesses and residents.
3. Exert solid, steady leadership to stabilize Baltimore City government and create a culture of integrity, transparency, and efficiency.
4. Support education and workforce development programs that prepare Baltimore residents for family-supporting jobs in high-growth industries and create programs or initiatives to attract talent to Baltimore City.
5. Utilize policy, funding, and intergovernmental coordination strategies to enhance Baltimore City's transportation and mobility infrastructure and operations.

Disclaimer: As a 501(c)4 organization, the Greater Baltimore Committee does not endorse candidates for public office. The information contained on this page and all engagement activities surrounding the election are for educational purposes only.

1. Prioritize enhanced coordination across criminal justice agencies and support evidence-based crime reduction strategies to improve public safety.
 - What are three actions that you would take in your first year to improve public safety?

I have put forth a crime plan that addresses the crime epidemic on day one. First, my administration is not going to be afraid to say we are going to have to arrest people. Our focus will be violent offenders and repeat offenders. While we can't police our way out of this situation, we must realize that there are some people who are consistently taking advantage of the "soft on crime" approach to the current state of lawlessness.

I will walk into City Hall on day one prepared to advocate for tougher penalties for those who illegally possess handguns. Those who illegally possess handguns are the clear and present danger in the city of Baltimore and we must ensure we are using every resource at our disposal to hold them accountable.

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I will work with the Governor to reconvene, but also reboot the Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee (CJCC). We MUST look at the violence from a higher level to ensure we are utilizing best practices from around the nation to effectively address the issues in our city. By reinstating the CJCC, we can bring together academics, criminal justice professionals, policymakers, data scientists, health officials, social leaders, and others to examine and recommend high-level strategies to analyze, prevent, and respond to crime more efficiently and effectively. Along with the reformation of the CJCC, I will immediately form Focused Development Teams. All of our city agencies, along with our state and federal partners, must all be part of the solution. Through a collaborative approach involving the BPD, State's Attorney's Office, Parole and Probation, Juvenile Services, the Office of African American Male Engagement, Social Services, the Department of Public Works, and a reconvened Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee, we can do more than arrest bad guys. Our Focused Development Teams will intervene and proactively counsel and monitor "at-risk individuals", while we address quality of life concerns, spur community improvement, protect victims and witnesses, treat trauma, and rebuild the community's trust in the police department.

My administration will end this sense of lawlessness by directing the police department to enforce laws and hold people accountable while policing constitutionally and in an equitable manner.

- As Mayor, what steps would you take to improve coordination across federal, state, and local criminal justice agencies and with the Judiciary?

I am the only candidate who has previously worn the uniform and been a commander in law enforcement. I have been part of federal task forces and understand the necessity and opportunity involved in a true collaboration. I will use my experience and existing relationships to put forth policies and ensure that our police department is adhering to the strategies that are in place. In order for coordinated crime reduction efforts with state and federal partners to be successful my administration will put forth ideas and strategies that BPD has not used or considered. We will think outside of the box. Under my leadership we will reach across the aisle to work with our Republican governor. This is an opportunity for a Mayor to truly put people over politics. I will be that Mayor. Any plan must be monitored for achievable results and focused on outcomes. The plan must also be flexible and adjustable if it is not achieving the desired results.

- What are your plans to address "squeegee kids" and panhandlers in City intersections?

Under my administration, I will put an end to "squeegee situation". I have put forth a plan to address the situation.

I have been vocal about the need to end the practice of allowing people to run in and out of traffic. I am the only candidate who has had the courage to call this problem out as what I believe it is: "It is a form of oppression to support and encourage them to work the corners instead of working towards finding legitimate work where you show up at a specific time everyday and file taxes on earned income." - T.J. Smith, candidate for mayor. (from WMAR) Some looked at this comment as controversial, but I stand by it and explain what I will do to ensure we are addressing those who have problems for long term sustainability. We cannot create vibrant communities and discuss equality without being honest and providing an opportunity out of situations that lead to a dead-end.

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Under my plan, we will create a bridge to opportunity while providing true wraparound services. Under my plan, we will offer those, including homeless, the opportunity to work, cleaning up Baltimore streets, vacant homes, and other various projects. This program is based on a successful program out of Albuquerque, NM and later adopted by several other cities around the country.

2. Implement strategic and inclusive economic development strategies to attract and retain businesses and residents.
 - What strategies or programs would you put into place to encourage businesses and residents to move to Baltimore City?

My administration will work with the Baltimore City Schools' superintendent to help create pathways for graduates to develop skills that align with the workforce needs. By creating a more replete pool of qualified candidates Baltimore will be more desirable to potential businesses looking to invest in the city.

In addition I will invest in existing and new industries by simplifying the process for businesses and developers to build, open new businesses, or reinvest in existing ones. We will appeal to private-sector investment by convening a work group to determine their respective needs and outline a plan to expedite implementation. This effort will be intentional so that communities that have long been underserved will benefit from an infusion of capital investments. It's important to make the investment in opportunity zones so that those become the anchor communities that begin Baltimore's renaissance. As Mayor I will also be intentional in using Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) as a tool to create investment opportunities in neglected communities.

- What strategies or programs would you put into place to encourage existing businesses and residents to stay and expand in Baltimore City?

Under my administration, I will meet with business owners in Baltimore to hear their concerns. This is a partnership and we must ensure we treat the relationship as such. I will direct my administration to conduct a full review of existing projects as well as dormant ones and devise strategies to aggressively focus on redevelopment and revitalization. For instance, the area surrounding Lexington Market should not only be a safe place for visitors and residents to patronize, but it should be expanded with a focus on foot/bike traffic with new development and a new vision. To borrow a term from education, I will use the Individual Development Plan to focus on areas surrounding redevelopment to ensure we are offering a sustainable path to the greater community and the investors. We will invest in small businesses and support them through key initiatives that will allow the small business sector to grow while ensuring larger companies have a place in Baltimore.

My administration will also prioritize vacant dwellings and offer comprehensive incentive packages to offload these properties. We will be aggressive and creative with revitalization. We also want to focus on new business and not simply business that will move from one part of the city to another, hence creating another vacancy.

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- Do you have ideas or suggestions to reform property tax structures in the City?

I am currently reviewing pathways to a fiscally responsible tax decrease for Baltimore. As part of my plan, we are reviewing city owned assets for potential sale in an effort to offset the upfront expenses of a tax cut. We will also put forth legislation for special increased taxes on those who are holding onto dilapidated and vacant properties. A tax cut in Baltimore is akin to a stimulus package. This is more than necessary and worthwhile and it can offer a stop gap to people and businesses who are fleeing the city because of taxes. I am confident that we are devising a responsible path to meaningful tax cuts.

- What are your top three priorities or programs to grow Baltimore's tax base?

**Public safety is one of the major priorities when it comes to stabilizing and growing Baltimore's tax base. Beyond public safety, we must:*

Create and embrace a diversified economy- We must spur entrepreneurship, small businesses, and local businesses. Ensure educational opportunities are in place to grow the local economy and connect people with employment. Ensure the population is prepared to work in a diversified economy. Prioritize transit-oriented development, while at the same time working on new modes of transportation to employment hubs.

Streamline policies, permits, etc... We will ensure we aren't overcomplicating the process of investing in Baltimore. We will work to dismantle the unnecessary bureaucracy and evaluate the need to increase staffing to streamline and clear up backlogs.

Market our city in a creative and competitive manner as an ongoing effort. Baltimore is an affordable place to live. We will design marketing around our Individual Development Plan areas and target areas of the country that are becoming more and more too expensive for working class people.

3. Exert solid, steady leadership to stabilize Baltimore City government and create a culture of integrity, transparency, and efficiency.
 - Baltimore City is at a crossroads and in need of strong, ethical leadership. Why are you the best candidate to lead the City into a new decade and chapter?

I am not a politician. I am a career public servant. I've lived and worked an honest and ethical life. This is personal for me. When politicians have chosen to cheat the residents of Baltimore, they cheated all of us. I lost my brother to the violence in our city. I've watched as the round robin of leaders have negatively impacted the city I grew up in. I swore an oath to protect and serve and uphold the constitution and that it was I have done. I am a person who believes in thinking outside of the box and doing things differently. Baltimore needs a "reset". I am the only candidate in this race who has worked at the top of three large metropolitan governments. I have worked for six mayors/county executives and eight police commissioners/chiefs.

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- What are three actions that you would take to improve transparency and efficiency in City government?

The Smith Administration will hold itself accountable by launching a public commitment tracker for the residents to see the progress we are making based on the promises made during the campaign.

I will contract an independent firm to complete a full forensic audit of government funds and its agencies.

I will then implement zero-based budgeting.

We will utilize Citistat in an effective way to focus on accountability and outcomes.

- Several charter amendments have been proposed and are pending legislative review and approval.
 - What is your position on the composition and function of the Board of Estimates?

My administration will convene a workgroup that will examine best practices in functioning governments around the country, specific to spending boards. There is no doubt the composition of the Board of Estimates needs to be revisited, but we must be methodical about our approach in changing it so as not to cause another problem that could be unanticipated. There are ways to ensure transparency, fairness, and balance, but I believe it should be studied and instituted appropriately. Under my administration, I will create a Chief Ethics Officer and increase funding to expand the Office of the Inspector General.

- Do you think that the Baltimore City Charter should require a Chief Administrative Officer? Please explain your answer.

City Administrative Officer (CAO)

If Baltimore is to hit its highest note – then the city needs a good conductor.

This is first and foremost the biggest and most needed change to city government. Every jurisdiction around us, including the city of Annapolis, has a chief administrative officer, city manager, or equivalent. The City Administrative Officer will oversee the day-to-day functions of the city agencies. Baltimore is in desperate need of a top-level administrator to oversee operations.

The City Administrative Officer (CAO) is an apolitical position. The City Administrative Officer will call the balls and strikes on city agencies to ensure an equitable and just delivery of city services as well as create efficiencies throughout government. Baltimore needs to be more nimble, cost effective and, most of all, dependable and accountable to the people it serves. The CAO will also play a large role in helping to oversee and determine the annual budget.

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- How would you structure your Administration (ie, CAO, Deputy Mayors, Chief of Staff, etc.) to provide the most efficient delivery of City services?

I am a candidate who is familiar with operating within an organizational structure and the importance of it for span of control, follow-up, continuity and most importantly, to eliminate silos and establish clear lines of communications. The following positions would report directly to me: The CAO, Solicitor, Communications Director, and Chief of Staff. The CAO would directly oversee four Deputy Mayors and the budget office. The four Deputy Mayors will oversee Operations, Public Safety, Health and Human Services, and Strategic Policies and Initiatives.

4. Support education and workforce development programs that prepare Baltimore residents for family-supporting jobs in high-growth industries and create programs or initiatives to attract talent to Baltimore City.
 - Under the recommendations of the Kirwan Commission, Baltimore City stands to receive an additional \$500 million annually in State education aid by Fiscal 2030. In order to receive this additional funding, Baltimore City must increase its investment as well, by \$330 million annually by Fiscal 2030. According to Maryland Department of Legislative Services figures, Baltimore City currently spends less than 15% of its budget on education compared to a statewide average of 36%. What is your plan to meet the increased obligation of Baltimore City? Please be specific in identifying areas or agencies that will see reduced appropriations as well as revenues that may be increased.

Before any cuts to services are considered, we will complete a forensic audit of funds and expenditures within the government. We will look at city owned property and examine the feasibility of selling it. In addition, we will revisit our position on tax-exempt organizations. We will also examine the state of expiring PILOTS and the potential revenue increase expected from that. Our commitment to the Inspector General's Office will assist my administration in identifying waste, fraud, and abuse coupled with the audits to ensure we are collecting funds that are due to the city. We will also task agencies to significantly and responsibly reduce overtime spending. I will also ask for state subsidies to assist us in offsetting the costs. We will show our fiscal responsibility while at the same time continuing to provide the necessary services for the residents of Baltimore. We will also responsibly reduce spending across all city agencies in a systematic way.

Once we have conducted full reviews of our current finances and assets, we will determine if the need still exists to find other revenue opportunities. We will not make cuts that affect the overall safety and health of the city.

- Currently, 0.2% of the City's budget is dedicated to workforce development. What is your position for funding workforce training and adult education programs to reduce unemployment and adequately prepare City residents for jobs in high-demand industries?

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Before we make a decision on any increases or decreases to funding, we will conduct a review of how the current allocation of funds is being spent. Part of this assessment will focus on the accountability of these funds and the outcomes that are being realized. I believe workforce development is key to a healthy and vibrant city. We want local residents to represent much of our city's employment base. My administration will specifically and intentionally allocate funding for workforce development and increase if the need is there. It is imperative that employers have a trained and educated workforce.

My administration will work with private and public organizations to ensure we are adequately serving the workforce. In my travels, I have found that the lack of qualified applicants is more of a problem than actual applicants. We will examine how money is being spent on workforce development to ensure our residents are knowledgeable and attractive to employers.

I will also ensure that the Baltimore City Schools CEO is a partner in this process. We must ensure we are graduating young people who are prepared for the available jobs in the available industries here in Baltimore. We will also expand work to expand workforce development opportunities through additional apprenticeships and internships.

- What role should the City play in attracting and retaining top talent to fill in-demand jobs in high-growth industry sectors?

The city will play a major role in attracting top tiered talent. We want to not only attract but incentivize them to live in Baltimore City. I will work with college/university Presidents to retain graduates and fold them into the workforce in Baltimore City. My administration will work with leaders in industry sectors to ensure Baltimore is included in the conversation of expansion and start-ups looking to develop roots.

5. Utilize policy, funding, and intergovernmental coordination strategies to enhance Baltimore City's transportation and mobility infrastructure and operations.

- What are three things you would do to improve transportation and mobility in the City?

I will work with the Governor and devise a plan for some local control over bus service to improve access and timeliness for residents. Transportation is a centerpiece of our development, investment, and improvement. We believe it would be advantageous to incorporate more express bus lines to move people in and around the city quicker.

I will convene a workgroup to examine specifically the necessity and viability of rideshare carpool subsidies to assist lower income residents, while also reducing the amount of vehicular traffic.

I will examine the feasibility of adding a true trolley version of the Charm City Circulator, specifically for the Downtown area. I believe making a more attractive mobility option to circulate around the waterfront, Canton, Harbor East, Fells Point, Inner Harbor, Port Covington, Federal Hill, and Locust Point. The goal is to attract people to using the transportation alternative and move people freely around to business/shopping/entertainment districts to increase foot traffic. A more visually and family-friendly option achieves this. In addition to the examination of this particular route of the Circulator, we will look to expand options further uptown to move people from areas of the city that continue to struggle with transportation needs.

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Additionally, my administration will study specific roads and communities for temporary or permanent vehicular restrictions to encourage more pedestrian and bike traffic with "Open Streets" events. Washington, D.C. has successfully accomplished this and Baltimore can do it as well.

- Do you support enhanced investment in transportation infrastructure, including that for pedestrians, bicycles, and scooters?

Everything we do will be tied to everything else. Sustainable, vibrant, and healthy communities afford its residents the opportunity to move around safely and efficiently by transportation modes other than vehicles. Having a focus on walking/biking/jogging/scooter trails or right-of-ways is a cornerstone to my administration's vision of a healthy community. I will invest in transportation infrastructure that specifically encourages alternatives to vehicular traffic. Improvements to infrastructure should include clear access for pedestrians and bicycles. Scooters are a great way to move in and around the city. My administration will improve the experience for all Baltimoreans by creating designated scooter drop-off zones. Currently, users simply discard their scooters wherever they choose, even on public right-of-ways blocking handicap accessibility. We have to look at this differently and put forth opportunities to properly stow the scooters.

- What is your position on the creation of a regional transit authority to oversee the transit network?

Many large cities have their own metropolitan transit authorities. Baltimore should be no different. The "independence" of the city that is so intertwined with our neighbors in Baltimore County should absolutely have a regional transit authority to oversee the local transit network. This would significantly enhance the opportunity to address transportation needs specific to the needs of Baltimore. As I said above, I will work with the Governor to gain some local control of bus lines in Baltimore. We have citizens who constantly complain about buses not being on time. This prevents residents from getting to work on time and distrust in reliability of our transit network. Without a dependable and reliable transit system, it is very difficult to encourage more people to utilize public transportation.

What we need:

Based on recommendations from the Baltimore Regional Transit Needs Assessment:

- *Public Information: Real-time arrival information, clearer signage and mapping, improved tools for trip planning.*
- *System Access: Universal fare collection across modes; multimodal hubs that create efficient connections to employment and cultural centers; focus on first and last mile needs.*
- *System Performance: Routinely updated plans for each MTA mode; enhanced and open data collection and analysis; signal and lane priority for transit vehicles.*
- *Safety and Security: Detailed incident reporting; reduction in overcrowded buses; increased local and state cooperation on station design and safety.*
- *Economic Integration: New transit lines into Baltimore and to regional job centers; improved connections between modes; investment in new and existing transit-oriented development (TOD).*

I agree with these recommendations and I believe that with more local/regional control, we can make significant progress on implementing them.