



# GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

## GBC's 2020 Baltimore City Election Coverage Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

### **CANDIDATE: DANTE SWINTON (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?

*1. Stop over-funding the BPD*

*2. Allocate major funding to invest in communities struggling most with crime - my PEACE Zones policy: [dcs4bmore.org/peace-zones](https://dcs4bmore.org/peace-zones)*

*3. Implement annual gun buyback program - 1,500 guns for \$1,500 apiece*

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

*Generally, I agree with improved communication and coordination among various levels of law enforcement. However, I think there's an underlying assumption in this question with which I don't agree: enhancing the level of law enforcement on our streets. We have spent \$2 billion on the BPD over the last four years, and spend more per person on policing annually than Chicago or New York. It's not working because we're not removing the factors that lead to crime - primarily, a lack of resources that increases desperation.*

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

*My plan to address the kids at our intersections involves paying attention to their parents' and guardians' needs. If they were able to make ends meet, the kids (and adults) wouldn't need to be in that position, and they could be in school. I am the only candidate with a comprehensive jobs plan, and it doesn't involve waiting for another Amazon to invest in Baltimore. A zero waste/circular economy is a massive jobs creator. Our current residential recycling rate is about 15%. Hitting a minimum of 70% will create 4,000 jobs in our city alone, and 2.3 million nationwide. Additionally, according to the US Chamber of Commerce, a 70% rate would add \$4.5 trillion to the national economy by 2030, or about an \$8.2 billion impact for Baltimore. What's more, every year, I want to invest \$18 million into small businesses throughout the city in my PEACE Zones policy. Regarding homeless residents, the cheapest way to tackle this issue is by homing them, and providing resources to stabilize their lives. We clearly haven't been succeeding in that.*

### 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?

*Please see above. Moreover, I want to cut property taxes by 25% in my first year, while also working with Annapolis to institute a 2% nonresident income tax to encourage residents to return to the city. These policies would coincide with my \$72 million annual investment in revamping vacant houses throughout the city for residents making 14K-32K annually, and for those making 33K-57K annually. In total, my PEACE Zones policy invests \$168 million into communities across the city. I also will work to get a match for such investments from private foundations across the country to up the investment closer to \$336 million annually.*

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

*Small businesses will get to benefit from the grants I'd provide, so long as they hire locally in their expansion. So, if a Fells Point restaurant expands to Sandtown, they would need to have the majority of the employees be residents of Sandtown. Related to this, I will revamp the zoning code to allow for communities that have been strictly residential to have a mix of retail opportunities.*

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

*As mentioned above, I will cut the property tax by 25%. A major benefit from doing this is freeing up more money in my first fiscal year to execute my policies. Currently, the city uses about \$34 million annually to lower the tax rate artificially for homeowners from \$2.248 to \$2.048. By cutting the rate to \$1.686, I free up that \$34 million for other policies in my first year. By moving more residents back in, we'll be able to lower the rate further.*

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

*As mentioned, my PEACE Zones policy will play a key role in the revitalization of this city. The \$72 million I mentioned before will be provided to local construction companies to revamp city-owned vacants, and those we will acquire through eminent domain. For example, for homes for residents making 14-32K, the local companies will be provided \$90,000 per home to assist in its renovation. For the second-tier homes, they'll receive \$30,000 per home. Each company will be limited to 10 homes - 5 of each level - so that competition remains. The companies now will own the homes, and we will establish and engage in collaborative programming to prepare the tenants to buy the homes within 5-10 years. Ownership by either the company or the tenant expands the tax base, and permits us to lower property taxes further.*

*I also will offer a firesale of other nonresident properties to businesses, provided they a) hire locally, b) pay living wages, c) commit to zero waste, and d) do not add to the level of air pollution in the community through its processes.*

*I am willing to provide reasonable tax incentives for green businesses to invest in Baltimore, but absolutely nothing like the packages offered to some recent projects or what we would've provided for Amazon's HQ2. The businesses would have to adhere to the previous requirements I mentioned.*

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 the best candidate because my policies proudly are outside-the-box. There are a number of candidates who either already have been in office, or advocate for policies that are just regurgitations of previous policies. That's not going to cut it. I have a unique-but-comprehensive approach to dealing with crime, and comprehensive plans on jobs, transit, waste, and climate, and a bold funding reallocation for our city's education system (\$75 million from the BPD budget, \$8 million from the eliminated subsidy for homeowners). My plans will lead to an immediate, positive change for our city - they are not something that will take two terms just to get into action. Choosing a candidate simply because of prior experience in office is exactly why we are in the situation we are today - too many old school views will continue to spin our wheels, and I am looking to build a better Baltimore right now.*

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

*Transparency-wise, I will eliminate the Board of Estimates, replacing it with a group comprised of all 15 councilmembers, the mayor, and the comptroller. Recusals still will be required, of course! Further, I want to give the people more power in future budgets, so I will implement a participatory budgeting policy that will include multiple points of engagement by voters, and an online vote every April. In terms of efficiency, I want to cut my staff from eight to at least four, and identify other positions throughout the city that were created as a political favor and serve no true purpose. I will terminate those positions.*

- 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?

*See above!*

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

*No. I do not want to add that layer of bureaucracy.*

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

*As mentioned, I want to make sure there aren't redundant or generally unnecessary positions in City Hall. The money saved from that can go to additional programs.*

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.

*As mentioned earlier, I add \$83 million toward our education budget already before taking Kirwan into consideration. The combination of policies I present - a zero waste economy, as well as a clean energy economy, and heavy investments in small businesses, among others - will allow us to raise*

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*additional funds to go toward Kirwan. Ultimately, I envision under \$200 million being allocated to BPD, which will allow us to fund true priorities. My existing plan moves some \$230 million from BPD into city revitalization projects initially, and as we truly eliminate crime with these projects, it will free more money to create a 21st century education for all students.*

- 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?

*I wholeheartedly support enhancing our funding for workforce development!*

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

*The city absolutely will work to play a role in attracting and retaining top talent, but we have to make sure we're providing opportunities for all residents. Only 28.7% of our 25+ workforce has a Bachelors degree, so we need to enhance the number of green collar jobs available*

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?

*1. Allocate more funding to the Charm City Circulator, expanding the route tree into Black Butterfly communities, and extending hours*

*2. Enhance the number of bus- and bike-only lanes, while also limiting street parking in a particular grid during peak times in preparation for more bus- and bike-only lanes*

*3. Re-syncing transit signals on about 130 intersections annually  
[dcs4bmore.org/transit](https://dcs4bmore.org/transit)*

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

*See above!*

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

*Absolutely! The more we can minimize car transport, the better. Baltimore is the 19th-worst place to live in the country with asthma, and by providing transit options not only for those in Baltimore City, but for those who choose not to return to the city to live, but still utilize our resources (roads), the better we will be.*