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## 2019 Council Questionnaire – Challenger

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### CANDIDATE CERTIFICATION

Candidate Name: Beth Finn Office Sought City Council at Large

I have read the attached questionnaire responses and certify that the information provided is accurate and the opinions stated accurately reflect my own positions.

Candidate Signature:  Date: 3/6/2019

**Please complete, sign and return this form via email in Word format to:**

**[gmgilman@igc.org](mailto:gmgilman@igc.org) and mail a copy with the signature page to**

**Gloria Gilman**

**121 S Broad St, Suite 1720**

**Philadelphia, PA 19107**

### BACKGROUND

1. What, if any, elected or appointed government office(s) have you held?

None

2. Background and viability questions:

a. What community or policy issues have you worked on, and in what capacity? (Please provide the names of two or three individuals who can provide information about your previous work.)

*Brain tumor advocacy - Ashley Brennan, Rabbi Eric Wisnia*

- Co-Chair of the Race for Hope Philadelphia, a 5K run and walk that raises nearly \$1 million annually for National Brain Tumor Society

- Volunteer Advocate and Mentor for Head to the Hill, an annual lobbying day asking Congress for more funding for research for treatments for brain tumors
- Board Member, Mid-Atlantic Regional Board, National Brain Tumor Society

*Women's Rights* - State Rep. Joanna McClinton

- Co-Founder of the Women's March on Philadelphia
- Co-Founder of Philly Women Rally, non-profit dedicated to advocating for women's rights and political involvement in greater Philadelphia

*Women and girls in STEM* - Tracey Welson-Rossman

- Volunteer instructor for TechGirlz TechShopz, programs that encourage middle school girls to pursue careers in STEM.
- Volunteer for Together for West Philadelphia Technology Careers program at West Catholic High School. This program is an impactful 5-week program teaching students about careers in technology. Students learn coding and engineering that culminates with a final showcase.

*Literacy*

- Volunteer Tutor for Innovations for Learning, a program that pairs corporate volunteer tutors and students remotely to help them become better readers.

b. What about your background or experience do you think most qualifies you to be elected? Please attach a brief bio.

I'm a technology leader-by-day turned activist-at-night with a passion for leaving the world a better place than I found it. I started my 20-year technology career writing Java applets and desktop applications in C++. My job now is to make sure we're solving the right problems.

I started as a computer programmer and web developer. I quickly advanced into management and eventually moved into project and program management. I've worked in many industries including advertising, entertainment, financial services, IT services, pharmaceuticals, and healthcare analytics. I now manage a multi-million-dollar portfolio of projects for Elsevier, a large healthcare analytics company building tools using the latest in Machine Learning, AI, and Natural Language Processing.

At 26, I was diagnosed with a life-threatening brain tumor. I had access to excellent doctors, treatments, and more than a small amount of good fortune, so my outcome was incredibly good. This is not the case for so many brain tumor patients. I ultimately realized that I better make my time count. I began volunteering with the National Brain Tumor Society as a co-chair of the Race for Hope Philadelphia, an annual 5K that raises close to \$1 million each year. I also joined NBTS to lobby Congress for more funding for brain tumor research. It was through this experience that I learned how powerful our voices are.

In 2016, I was shaken to my core when I heard then-candidate Trump talk about a national Muslim registry. As a Jewish woman, "Never again" means taking action. I volunteered for the Hillary campaign and knocked on nearly 2,000 doors. Soon after the election was over, I organized with fellow women in our city to create Philly Women Rally, and am a co-founder of the Women's March on Philadelphia. It has been a powerful, life-changing experience. The planning and day of the annual march have provided me with an incredible set of learning opportunities to see the beautiful diversity and heart-breaking disparity that exists in our city and our country.

c. What other endorsements have you received?

I have support from State Reps. Joanna McClinton and Brian Sims.

d. How do you plan to win?

I have strong support in Center City and River Wards as well as South Philadelphia. The Jewish population of the city will also support me. I believe there will be increased voter turnout in this election cycle from young people and people motivated by the Women's Marches on Philadelphia, and I will have strong support with those groups as well.

e. How much money have you raised? How much do you expect to raise?

I've raised \$15,000. My goal is to raise \$300,000.

3. What three things would you most want to accomplish if elected?

1. *Reinvesting in Our Infrastructure*

Investing in infrastructure is at the core of how we make sure all Philadelphians have access to the same opportunities.

I support the creation of a public bank for Philadelphia to maximize our limited funds for infrastructure by recapturing millions of dollars currently lost every year to bank fees and interest payments, and eventually offering banking services to low-income residents.

We must be proactive in repairing our critical systems – like our almost century-old water mains – while they are still manageable challenges and before they become big crises. We must protect the health and safety of students. Lead paint chips are falling from the ceilings of our children's schools. 75% of our public school buildings don't have air conditioning leading to unsafe conditions during the hotter months. Our public transportation must be reliable, safe, and convenient. Technology can help address some of these challenges with things like real-time bus schedules and a user-friendly transit app.

Investing in public works isn't just the right thing to do. It's the smart thing to do.

2. *Affordable Housing*

Our supply of housing stock must keep up with demand across the city. The Affordable Housing Trust Fund must be focused on building homes for families earning 80% of AMI and lower. We also must increase our percentage of mixed-income housing from the current rate of 13% to at least 30%. For comparison, Boston is at 38% and Hoboken is at 32%. The improved quality of the environment changes the behavior of the residents: reducing crime and unemployment, breaking the cycle of poverty, creating upward mobility, and strengthening local businesses. When our neighborhoods have diversity of race, socioeconomic status, and culture, they are sustainable and vibrant places to live, work, and visit.

3. *\$15 Minimum Wage*

Earning a livable wage to afford basic necessities is a crucial component of affordable housing. People should not have to work two or three jobs (or more) to afford the basic necessities. I support expanding on Mayor Kenney's plan for a \$15/hour minimum wage for city employees. Because of a state law, the city cannot mandate a minimum wage. We can encourage businesses to do the right thing. My approach is to start with our large non-profit medical and educational institutions. If they agree to pay their employees a \$15/hour minimum wage, we leave them alone about not contributing into the PILOTS program. This is a win/win/win: The city benefits because our city wage tax base increases. Employers benefit because employees are more loyal when they have a living wage, saving on turn-over and new hiring processes. People benefit because they have more money to spend at our restaurants, local businesses, and incredible cultural institutions.

## ISSUES

Although many of the questions below call for a simple yes or no answer, please feel free to provide an explanation for any of your choices. If you have not yet come to a final decision, please state which way you are leaning and what additional information you would need before deciding, if any.

### I. Economic Development

Would you:

1. Raise the City minimum wage to \$15 an hour, either directly or by imposing an impact fee on businesses paying less than \$15?

Yes. (See top 3 priorities above for more information.)

2. Take \$200 million of City pension funds now invested in the stock market to invest in neighborhood economic development projects?

Yes. This is a smart investment that creates a win/win for pension fund money and residents that built up our neighborhoods into what they are today. New York City first announced plans to do this practice in the fall of 2017 and it works. With a competitive rate of return of four to five percent this is a serious investment that should also be used to prioritize specific vulnerable groups like veterans and single mothers with children.

3. Require City-funded or tax-abated projects to employ a high percentage of City resident workers, especially low and moderate income City residents?

Yes. The City is providing attractive tax relief programs at the expense of potential income and therefore we must maximize our rate of return. We have to take a closer look at this idea when it involves skilled workers and see how we can partner with these businesses to provide job training as well.

4. Create a program to provide technical assistance and start-up funding for cooperative, worker-owned businesses?

If there is a demand for these kinds of businesses in Philadelphia, we should create an organization to provide these back-office services to them, much like the Urban Affairs Coalition does for non-profits. This new organization could be supported by local government, but it should ultimately be an independent authority. More worker-owned businesses would allow employees to have a significant voice in the direction of their companies.

5. Reform PIDC, the City's main economic development funding agency, so that its Board has a majority of public and community members, rather than Chamber of Commerce appointed members?

Yes, with an addendum. I've worked in the private sector for 20 years while also dedicating my free time to volunteerism and public good programs. Economies thrive when businesses and the public honor their symbiotic relationship. In our capitalist system, the business side often enjoys outsized influence and, therefore, it's the responsibility of our government to protect and regulate. The community members should have a one-seat majority.

6. Require the City to withdraw subsidies from corporations that fail to provide jobs or other benefits to City residents?

I'm leaning "Yes." I need to study the economic impacts of the corporations that receive these subsidies to understand if and how the current policy provides a quantifiable contribution to our city

and residents. I also need to understand if there are enough people with appropriate skill sets living in the city to fill all the roles required.

7. Bar or limit privatization of City property and work done by City employees? More specifically are there any circumstances under which you would sell PGW?

We need to reach 100% renewables in 10 years. As big as the price tag may be for PGW, we have to think big picture. We must phase out this plant and replace its energy output in the long run.

8. Sponsor and sign legislation to create a Philadelphia Public Bank?

Yes. I fully support the creation of a public bank for Philadelphia. Every year, our city loses millions of dollars in bank fees and interest payments to big banks that also use that money to invest in some ventures that go directly against my values. A public bank maximizes our limited funds for infrastructure by recapturing that money and loaning it to ourselves. A public bank is for the public good. Once established, I also want our public bank to offer basic checking account services to low-income residents.

## II. Taxation

Would you:

1. Increase taxes to support City and/or School District services, and if so, which ones?

Instead of leaning too heavily on a single funding solution, we need to find multiple revenue streams. To save money in the general fund, the city council needs to add a development impact fee, which is a one-time charge on the amount the city pays for infrastructure related to construction of a new development. The money saved from the general fund can then be applied to schools.

I also want to legalize marijuana and use that tax revenue to support our schools. States that have legalized marijuana have collected more than \$1.6 billion and have used that revenue for things like funding schools and mental health services. California is expected to collect more than \$2.1 billion through 2020 on a 15% excise tax. Raising taxes can be challenging and legalizing marijuana provides a welcome revenue stream, ends a racist policy, and saves our law enforcement significant time and money that can be reallocated to pressing work in communities.

2. Reduce taxes as an economic development strategy, and, if so, which ones?

No. When we're a city that's growing in a good economy, we shouldn't cut taxes for businesses. We need the revenue and cutting taxes too often means we must also cut the budget. If our goal is faster growth, we need to make sure people have more money in their pockets. We need to boost spending on city programs that benefit lower-income residents. Poor people are far more likely to need and spend an extra \$100 than a millionaire. I support creating a local EITC program that uses the federal EITC system so the administrative costs are low. We can leverage the YouEarnedItPhilly.com website to establish the program. A local EITC program currently exists in a handful of cities: New York City, Denver, San Francisco, and Montgomery County, Maryland.

3. Support the Soda Tax? Please explain your answer.

The soda tax needs to be changed and expanded. Studies show poor people typically spend a higher portion of their income on soda. So, although a soda tax has been somewhat effective in deterring unhealthy habits and raising revenue for needed universal pre-K, it disproportionately hurts the poor. The current soda tax is based on volume, which is regressive. The soda tax needs to be amended to be based on a percentage of the price. Then, the tax on a bottle of premium liquor would be greater than

the tax on a liter of soda or a six-pack of beer. Additionally, high-end products can also have a luxury tax so that premium liquor, tobacco, and other products are charged at a higher rate of sales tax.

4. Support the 10-year Tax Abatement Program for new development as it currently exists? If not, what specific changes would you make?

When the economy is down, the tax abatements serve a useful purpose. Now that our housing market is strong, the abatement is preventing much needed funds from getting to the city and its residents. The current 10-year tax abatement program is no longer serving the purpose for which it was originally intended. We need to revisit its effectiveness to make sure it's being used in neighborhoods where it would actually make a difference rather than places where development would be happening anyway. We must examine the data to determine the proper length of time to offer tax abatements, and we should allow for variations based on neighborhood. I would change the policy so the tax abatement is triggered when key indicators show we're in an economic downturn. In the current economy, I would eliminate the 10-year tax abatement.

5. Bring suit to challenge the nonprofit status of the University of PA and other huge non-profits if they don't agree to make payments in lieu of taxes to the City?

Although I agree with the lawsuit on principle, I don't see a strong legal argument that the University is required to pay into the PILOTs program.

### III. Education

Would you:

1. Enact a plan that would help regulate charter schools by making their budgetary practices transparent, riding them of conflicts of interest, and stopping them from cherry-picking their student bodies? If so, what would that plan look like?

Yes. I support public education. I would advocate to increase the funding pot from the state and federal level and to convert our school board from appointed to elected. Our schools were taken over by the state as a distressed district and it took over ten years to get control back. The status of our schools is deplorable and made worse by the significant drain of resources by charter schools. Though charter schools seem to have attractive benefits, like an escape from the burdensome standardized testing curriculum and outdated education goals, they do more harm than good. Charter schools undermine our teacher unions and aren't held to the same standards and requirements as our public schools. Charter schools should be restricted from using public money to buy or build new schools that become private property. My plan is based on the governance board suggestions for overseeing pre-K: fiduciary accountability through regular financial reports and an audit every year; program accountability using data to evaluate student outcomes, an independent review after the third year, and annual public reports; transparency by having big decisions announced in a public format; accessibility by having public meetings to get input from community members; and equity to ensure equal opportunity for all students in the city.

2. Provide universal pre-k to all 3 and 4 year olds in the City?

Yes. Large-scale localized pre-K initiatives have an irreplaceable lasting impact on the life of a young person. In addition, the inclusion of high-quality pre-K programs includes health screenings that can identify and treat challenges early on – like hearing or visual impairment – that would otherwise hinder a child from learning well.

3. Compute the cost/benefit ratio for the School District of all proposed KOZ zones before they're approved by Council?

Yes. The current KOZ zone approval process is moving too fast for the public to determine which sites are blighted and would benefit from the tax relief and which sites already have construction underway. If approved, these construction projects are lost revenue for our schools. At best, it's a gamble about which sites benefit. At worst, it's corporate welfare. We need more information to ensure we're doing right by our teachers and students.

4. Develop a plan to deal with the bankruptcy facing the School District due to the growth in the number of charter schools in the City, all of whose expenses must by law be paid by the District? Please explain.

At its core, this is a money problem. Our schools are struggling and need more revenue. I believe in progressive taxation that doesn't rely on property taxes alone. These are the kinds of solutions that align with my values and have the ability to be implemented in some combination of the state and local level:

1. Raise the Individual Income Tax to 5% or 6%. This would bring in \$4 to \$7 billion in additional revenue.
2. Introduce a Progressive Income Tax. This would bring in around \$1 billion annually.
3. Recoup Surplus Funds from TIF Districts to be redirected to school districts.
4. Implement a .1% Financial Transaction Tax and use the revenue for education, which has a wide range of projected annual revenue: a low estimate of \$1 billion and a high estimate of \$11 billion.

#### **IV. Criminal Justice**

Would you:

1. Grant the civilian police review board subpoena power with the ability to suspend or fire police officers found to engage in misconduct?

Yes. The civilian Police Advisory Commission must have the power to enforce a system of checks and balances, accountability, and transparency.

2. Use savings from closing the House of Corrections to invest in job training programs and opportunities for formerly incarcerated people, in an effort to combat mass incarceration?

Yes.

3. Bar employers from denying jobs to ex-offenders without a specific job-related basis?

Yes. "Ban the box" is currently a city law, called, The Fair Criminal Records Screening Standards. We should also ban the box on college applications.

4. End the stop and frisk program?

We must end "Stop and Frisk." It does nothing to make our communities safer. It is unconstitutional, unfairly targets brown and black people, and the data shows it does not result in recovering more weapons or drugs.

#### **V. Housing**

1. Do you think Philadelphia is facing a housing crisis? If so, why? If not, why not? What changes would you make to bring housing policy more in line with your vision?

We are unquestionably in a housing crisis. We simply need to look at similar cities for a preview of what's to come. The supply of housing in Philadelphia is low while the demand is high, driving prices up. Philadelphia is the poorest large city in the country. We have a lot of people earning lower incomes, people who can't afford the housing that we have, and that leads to homelessness and other problems.

When our neighborhoods have diversity of socioeconomic status, they are sustainable places for residents and businesses.

2. Would you:

a. Enact a rent stabilization program?

Yes. Short-term rent control (5 to 10 years) is imperative to allow our income to catch up to our cost of living. Left unaddressed, people will lose their homes and our unhoused population will increase. Long-term rent control reduces the supply and increases the demand and costs of the limited units available. Long-term rent control takes too many housing units off the market, effectively freezing a generation of residents in a neighborhood and reducing the available units in the future. The Los Angeles neighborhoods of Santa Monica, Venice Beach, and West Hollywood all have long-term rent control that has worked out great for a small population of residents lucky to be in the right place at the right time. But long-term rent control prevents neighborhoods from growing to meet demand and makes it very challenging for future residents to find affordable homes in desirable neighborhoods, which then acts a catalyst for gentrification in other neighborhoods. Short-term rent control is needed now.

b. Enact inclusionary zoning requirements to compel inclusion of affordable units in all market rate developments?

I will fight for inclusionary zoning and mixed-income housing. We need to manage our growth responsibly. While gentrification can bring growth and renewal to a neighborhood, we must address its effects on the area's longtime residents and consider the people living there first, not last. We also need to revisit the effectiveness of existing density programs like mandatory minimums for parking.

c. Support a dedicated fund to provide technical assistance and start up funding for land trusts and housing co-ops?

Yes, we should have programs like the Urban Affairs Coalition for land trusts and housing co-ops. Land trusts ensure the long-term affordability of neighborhoods facing gentrification by allowing residents and businesses to own and control their properties. We've seen good outcomes with the current 36 rent-to-own units on trust-held land. I would use my office to promote the land trust model, like the Community Justice Land Trust, and expand it into other parts of the city.

d. End, limit or curtail Councilmanic prerogative over land disposition?

We must end councilmanic prerogative. The current system goes against transparency standards and allows one individual to control all zoning decisions within a district. This practice empowers a city councilmember to determine the sale of properties in their district in exchange for favors, like campaign donations. Councilmanic prerogative is closed-door backroom deal-making at the expense of what's best for the city as a whole.

e. Require the land bank to prioritize the disposition of properties for low-income and cooperatively owned developments?

Land banks are supposed to make it easy for purchasing city-owned properties. We need to commit a portion of profits from land bank sales to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. We need to end the 10-year tax abatement on property taxes for new construction. I'm in favor of the previously proposed 1% construction tax. The currently optional Inclusionary Zoning provisions should be made mandatory. We

also need to make sure that Licenses and Inspections can properly enforce those regulations. I would use my office to organize community events that bring together assistance programs that address food and housing security like Bethesda Project and mental health services like Healthy Minds Philly.

## **VI. Climate Justice**

1. What, if anything, can the city do to address the fundamental factors driving climate change?

See question 2.

2. Do you support a Green New Deal for Philadelphia and, if so, what does that mean to you and what will you do if elected to City Council to implement it?

Yes, I support a Green New Deal for Philadelphia: a dramatic increase in public works projects and incentivization programs that transition our city to 100% renewable energy within 10 years. We need to implement data-driven policies that reduce our carbon footprint as a city. It takes ideas big and small to meet our goal.

New Jersey has a solar panel tax credit program we could benefit from using here in Philadelphia.

We need to get people out of their cars and using greener travel options. Therefore, we need more protected bike lanes, pedestrian walkways, and raised crosswalks at intersections to reduce traffic and emissions, and increase public safety, which encourages people to walk and not drive.

Look at our city from a bird's eye view and you'll see dark impermeable surfaces stretching in every direction. These hard surfaces absorb heat and deflect rain. Rooftop gardens are inexpensive, green solutions to reduce heat across the city, capture water, and clean the air. Fun fact: Philadelphia has a huge network of beehives on rooftops throughout the city. We can expand partnership rebates with PECO to encourage residents to purchase energy efficient appliances. Valuable rainwater runs through sewers to the Delaware River. We need better stormwater management through infrastructure and incentivization programs and stormwater planters.

China is refusing our materials to be recycled and so the city now incinerates 50% of our recycling, contributing to poor air quality and wasting useful materials. Therefore, we must explore the building of a recycling plant in Philadelphia. Our climate has changed and if we do nothing, it will only get worse. Our policies must be equal to the challenges we face.

3. What is your position on the proposal to build a new Liquefied Natural Gas Plant in Southwest Philadelphia?

I am opposed to the Liquefied Natural Gas Plant in Southwest Philadelphia. We need to get to 100% renewable energy in 10 years.

## **VII. Money In Politics**

In light of the recent indictments involving elected officials, what is your position on:

- a. Accepting gifts or services

I am against accepting gifts and services. If I'm lucky enough to be elected, I would be a public servant. Accepting gifts and services does not serve the public good and goes against my values.

- b. Accepting donations from corporate PACs that do work for the city

No. See above.

- c. Public financing of city elections

Yes, I love this idea. For example, the City of Los Angeles has a matching funds program for city council candidates of 6:1. It allows first-time and lower-income candidates to compete in elections.

### **VIII. General Statement**

Use this space to provide any further information that you would like us to consider about your candidacy, not covered by the questions above.

Our quality of life directly impacts our quality of health. Healthcare includes everything that affects our health: the air we breathe and the water we drink; the building materials in our schools and apartments; the ability to easily access parks and public transportation. As a tech leader, I specialize in diagnosing flaws in the process. We must look at our city's systems holistically and ensure that each step of the process protects our health and betters the lives of all Philadelphians.