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## 2019 Council Questionnaire – Challenger

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### CANDIDATE CERTIFICATION

Candidate Name: Sherrie Cohen      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: 3/6/19

**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?

I have not been elected to government office, but have been elected to positions in the Democratic Party.

I am an elected committeeperson in the 17th Ward and an elected State Committeeperson in the 4th State Senatorial District.

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.)

Attorney, Brodie & Rubinsky, P.C. Attorney focused on Lead Based Paint Ordinance litigation. Represented tenants in Landlord/Tenant Court in actions to enforce city's Lead Law, requiring lead inspections be conducted prior to the move-in date of any tenant with children ages 6 and under. Helped draft proposed amendments to Lead Law to eliminate loopholes in the law. Amendments to the Lead Law are now before Council. Josh Rubinsky

Advocacy Committee, Women's Community Revitalization Project, fighting to increase funding to the Housing Trust Fund for the building of low-income housing in Philadelphia. Christi Clark, Nora Lichtash

Member, PCAPS, Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools. Promoted community schools, assisted parent organizing in elementary schools facing proposed Renaissance charter conversions, testified before School Reform Commission numerous times. Kendra Brooks, Tonya Bah

Member, Live Free Team, POWER, Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower and Rebuild. Participated in campaign to end cash bail. Pastor Nicolas O'Rourke

Attorney/Organizer, Tenant Union Representative Network. Staffed the Help Desk at Landlord/Tenant Court, providing legal advice to tenants at risk of eviction; taught weekly classes on tenant rights; organized tenants in HUD-assisted affordable housing to preserve affordability of housing. Phil Lord

Coordinator, Coalition For Essential Services, a labor/community coalition which fought for a fair and equitable budget not balanced on the backs of poor and working people; co-chaired Community Forum for the Next Governor. Stan Shapiro, Gloria Gilman

Steering Committee, Coalition to Save the Libraries, a coalition of members of the 11 neighborhood libraries threatened with permanent closure and allies. Also, was one of the lawyers who sued to keep the libraries open, and we won! Received Friends of Free Library Award as a Champion of the Greater Good. Betty Beaufort, Kristin Campbell

Executive Committee, Friends of the David Cohen Ogontz Branch Library. Seek to build community support for the branch; plan children's programs. Leni Johnson

Co-Chair, International Women's Day Coalition, a coalition of labor and women's groups demanding rights and liberation for working women locally and internationally. Arleen Olshan

Co-Chair, Liberty City Democratic Club, a group endorsing pro-LGBT candidates in greater Philadelphia. Gary Hines, Lee Carson

Co-Chair, Allies Caucus, Elements, a predominantly Black queer womyn of color organization.

Conducted workshops for allies to increase their action in solidarity with Black queer womyn.

Adrienne Williams, Shayna Sheness Israel

Co-Chair, Civil Rights Committee, Philadelphia Bar Association. Committee conducted public education and advocated before the Bar's Board of Governors to pass resolutions on local, state, and national civil rights issues. Michael Carroll, Robert Meek

Member, Community Grantmaking Committee, Bread and Roses Community Fund. Committee reviewed applications, interviewed and recommended community organizing groups for funding. Casey Cook

Member, Steering Committee, Fair Taxation Coalition. Fought to maintain David Cohen wage tax credit for working families living in poverty. Stan Shapiro, Jonathan Stein

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

1) My lifelong dedication to movements for racial, economic, social and gender justice.

2) My organizing/advocacy work in recent years fighting for tenant rights, affordable housing, parent leadership in the schools, an end to cash bail, a fair and equitable city budget not balanced on the backs of poor and working people, full funding for our schools, libraries, pools and youth job programs, fair taxation, women's liberation, queer liberation, and local, national and international civil rights issues.

c. What other endorsements have you received?

To date, the Faculty and Staff Federation of the Community College of Philadelphia has endorsed me.

In 2015, I believe I received endorsements from every progressive organization that endorsed in that race, including Neighborhood Networks, and also from City Committee.

d. How do you plan to win?

My plan to win is to be an unapologetically bold progressive and movement candidate, who is an open democratic socialist, lesbian feminist, and activist committed to a human rights agenda, including climate justice, housing justice, an end to mass incarceration, educational justice and immigration justice.

I seek to expand the electorate and motivate young voters aged 18-34 (who now comprise the highest percentage of the Philadelphia Democratic electorate at 33%, and whose turnout increased by 29% from 2014 to 2018), tenants (now estimated to be 48% of Philadelphians), the formerly incarcerated (estimated at approximately 300,000 people), and the approximately 130,000 Philly Bernie voters (since I was an elected Bernie delegate to the 2016 Democratic National Convention).

I believe my campaign's effort, that of the progressive and environmental electoral groups who endorse me, and the consistent support I have received in my prior campaigns of over 44,000 votes in 2011 and over 45,000 votes in 2015 will bring me victory in 2019.

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

I have raised over \$70,000 and expect to raise over \$120,000.

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

1) Establishing rent control for Philly tenants.

2) Establishing elected community boards in City Council districts to decide land disposition issues, instead of the current system of councilmanic prerogative

3) Establishing a citywide community benefits ordinance, requiring that in all development projects of a certain size, a developer must provide a number of community benefits.

## 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. \$15/hour should be the minimum. Folks can't survive on \$7.25, PA's starvation wage. However, according to calculations of employment earnings that are necessary to meet a family's basic needs in Philadelphia while also maintaining self-sufficiency, a living wage for an adult in Philadelphia with one child would be \$25.36/hour, \$30.60/hour for an adult with 2 children, and \$38.41/hour for an adult with 3 children.

2. Take \$200 million of City pension funds now invested in the stock market to invest in neighborhood economic development projects? Yes, upon dialogue with DC33 and 47.

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

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

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

6. Require the City to withdraw subsidies from corporations that fail to provide jobs or other benefits to City residents? Yes
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? Yes to first question. None, as to second question.
8. Sponsor and sign legislation to create a Philadelphia Public Bank? Yes

## II. Taxation

Would you:

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

I would end the 10-year property tax abatement (and earmark the 55% school portion toward cleaning up toxic schools, and the 45% city portion to the Housing Trust Fund for families making less than 30% of the area median income); enact PILOTS for large non-profits at 50% of their estimated forgone taxes; restore the BIRT (Business Income and Revenue Tax), particularly the Gross Receipts portion, to pre-2018 cut levels (1.415% on gross receipts); increase the Use and Occupancy tax to 1.5% and proportionally increase the exemption; enact impact fee on low-wage employers who fail to pay their employees a living wage.

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

I would make nontaxable the first \$25,000 of income for the city wage tax, and make permanent the LOOP (Longtime Owner Occupants Program).

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

Yes, even though it is a regressive tax, because these funds are needed to increase pre-K, community schools, and for the Rebuild program.

4. Support the 10-year Tax Abatement Program for new development as it currently exists? If not, what specific changes would you make? No. See response to #1 above.
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? Yes

## 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, that plan would include the issues mentioned above, as well as: a requirement that charters comply

with federal and state civil rights laws, a requirement that charters maintain admissions, hiring and operational practices that are designed to promote equity.

2. Provide universal pre-k to all 3 and 4 year olds in the City? Yes
3. Compute the cost/benefit ratio for the School District of all proposed KOZ zones before they're approved by Council? Yes
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.

Yes. First, we must fight to restore the charter reimbursement line item in the state budget. The elimination of this line item has cost Philadelphia \$100 million a year. Second, we need to declare a charter school moratorium due to this pending financial crisis. Third, new standards of charter accountability must be established. Fourth, upon a time certain set forth in the new standards, charter schools should be given warnings, then closed if they haven't met the accountability standards.

#### **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, though the police contract may also need to be changed to include these powers.

I will fight for police accountability and community oversight and control of the police. Our Police Advisory Commission should instead be a Police Accountability Commission, which is equipped with enforcement powers.

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. It is time to decarcerate our city. The "Creek," as it is known, must be permanently closed, as it represents the most destructive policies of mass criminalization and human rights abuses. Philadelphia spends from \$115 to \$135 to detain one person for one day, and the city loses \$160 in opportunity costs per person, per day. Fixed costs would remain if the Creek is not demolished. This money must be reinvested in the communities most harmed by incarceration.

3. Bar employers from denying jobs to ex-offenders without a specific job-related basis? Yes
4. End the stop and frisk program?

I would end our current unconstitutional and racist stop and frisk program. A 2018 ACLU report shows that, in the first six months of 2017, as many as 20,000 people were stopped without a justifiable reason, that two of every five frisks occurred without cause, and that 69% of the people stopped were Black people, though they are only 48% of the population.

## 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?

Philadelphia is facing a housing crisis. We have a huge shortage of affordable housing for the lowest-income Philadelphians. We have an eviction crisis where 1 in 14 tenants gets evicted.

I believe that housing is a human right and not a commodity for profit. We must end displacement caused by gentrification, redlining, the property tax abatement, and plans to build Temple's stadium in North Philly.

We must fight for \$100 million for our Housing Trust Fund, like Washington, D.C., a vast increase in affordable, accessible and decent housing, lead-free homes, the right to counsel for tenants facing eviction, expanded just cause legislation, rent control, an end to discrimination against voucher holders, housing coops, community land trusts, expungement of eviction records, a moratorium on sheriff sales when the rate is high in a specific community, accountability for slumlords, accountability for banks that have engaged in the discrimination of redlining.

Though some housing in Philadelphia might be considered affordable, that housing is often substandard. Philadelphians suffer some of the most substandard housing in the country because of the aged housing stock. We need to invest in repairs for people, so our children and families are not being poisoned by lead and mold, and have heat in the winter and are cool in the summer.

2. Would you:

a. Enact a rent stabilization program?

Yes. The rent is too damn high! The increasing rent in Philadelphia is causing displacement. In West Philadelphia, as an example, housing costs increased by 98% between 2000 and 2012 and are continuing to rise rapidly. In this same 12-year period, the median income in West Philadelphia dropped 11% and the Black population in the most gentrifying areas dropped 29% as the white population rose.

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

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

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

Yes. Councilman prerogative is undemocratic. We need community control over land and housing. I am demanding that the power over land disposition be given to elected Community Board in each Council District. No one person should be given so much power.

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

## VI. Climate Justice

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

We need a rapid and just transition to 100% renewable energy citywide, no further fossil fuel infrastructure, and we must commit to community control of our energy infrastructure. As the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported this past October, there are only a dozen years in which to act to avoid the worst effects of climate change. Global warming pollution must be cut to near zero in this period.

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?

I support the entire People's Platform for a Just Philadelphia, including the following section:

I “[c]ommit to the goals of a Green New Deal by investing in a more democratic, renewable and equitable energy system: [I will]

- Demand that the City invest in and prioritize community-owned renewable energy projects by Black, Brown and poor communities in its energy procurement portfolio.
- Commission and fund a public and participatory study to take community control of PECO.
- Commission and fund community-labor led studies on transitioning PGW to 100% renewable energy.
- Divest from fossil fuel investments in the City Pension Fund and reinvest in a just transition from fossil fuel energy and engage in efforts that center labor and environmental justice communities.
- Advocate for a federal Green New Deal to advance efforts to move Philadelphia towards a democratically controlled 100% renewable energy system by 2030 through unionized job creation that prioritizes Philadelphia's working class and communities of color.”

Further, we must “[c]ommit to a healthy fossil-free energy system and hold our polluters accountable:

- Pass a moratorium on the development of fossil fuel infrastructure in Philadelphia.
- Transition the Philadelphia Energy Solutions oil refinery to restored public land and community-owned renewable energy projects.
- Amend the Air Management Service's permitting process to adopt a Cumulative Impacts Analysis and a Health Impacts Analysis.
- Advocate that Attorney General Josh Shapiro collect state back taxes owed by the Philadelphia Energy Solution's oil refinery and enforce clean-up of toxins from Sunoco's ownership.

- Support a Good Neighbor Agreement between the Philadelphia Energy Solutions with surrounding neighborhoods as a precondition to the RNG ENergy biogas development.”

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

I oppose the proposal. We must focus on a just transition of PGW to 100% renewable energy, not on a failed fossil fuel strategy that is endangering the survival of Mother Earth and all life on it, and destroying the air quality and health of Philadelphians. PGW’s proposed LNG plant, which would liquefy, store and transport up to 2.7 billion cubic feet (bcf) of gas annually for the next 25 years, is a massive amount of climate-causing pollution. Also, natural gas contains methane, a potent greenhouse gas which is 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide in warming the planet. Methane leaks, even small ones, can have serious consequences.

## **VII. Money In Politics**

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

- a. Accepting gifts or services

We need a ban on accepting of gifts and services.

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

We need a ban on donations from corporate PACs that do work for the city.

- c. Public financing of city elections

We need public financing of city 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.

A lifelong activist in many movements for social justice, I am a tenant rights attorney, a Jewish lesbian feminist and a democratic socialist.

I believe that everybody’s got a right to live. Everyone has the right to a quality education; a living wage; decent affordable and accessible housing; and health care; the right to walk down a street without getting racially profiled; sexually harassed, or shot. These are our human needs and our human rights. I am a fighter for human rights, for justice, for the healing of our communities and for social and economic liberation.

Below is the slightly modified version of the "plan to win" section in my questionnaire response for running as an Independent candidate in the 2019 Fall General Election::

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My plan to win is to be an unapologetically bold progressive candidate, who is an open democratic socialist, lesbian feminist, and activist committed to a human rights agenda, including climate justice, housing justice, an end to mass incarceration, educational justice and immigration justice.

I know that a major part of this campaign will be to educate the Democratic electorate on the importance of voting Independent for Council At-Large, so we can replace a Republican Councilperson and expand the number of bold progressives on Council in order to move a progressive agenda forward.

I also seek to expand the electorate by motivating young voters aged 18-34 (who now comprise the highest percentage of the Philadelphia Democratic electorate at 33%), tenants (estimated to be 48% of Philadelphians), the formerly incarcerated (estimated at approximately 300,000 people), the approximately 130,000 Philly Bernie voters (since I was an elected Bernie delegate to the 2016 Democratic National Convention), and the Independents (125,000 Philadelphians are registered Independents and comprise a higher percentage of the electorate than registered Republicans).

I believe my campaign's effort, that of the groups who endorse me, the support I received in my prior campaigns of over 44,000 votes in 2011 and over 45,000 votes in 2015, and my name recognition, will bring me victory in 2019, even though I recognize that running in the general election is a very different race than running in the primary election.

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