



Cleveland Heights City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Dear Candidate:

This questionnaire is a prerequisite for consideration for endorsement by the Cleveland Heights Democrats at our endorsement meeting at 7:00 p.m. on September 13, 2017 at the Cleveland Heights Community Center, One Monticello Boulevard, Cleveland Heights, Ohio. You are encouraged to attend this meeting, and if you choose to do so, you will be given an opportunity to speak to the Club prior to the voting on endorsements.

With respect to the endorsement meeting, only club members who are in good standing and on the official membership roster for thirty or more consecutive days prior to September 13, 2017 may vote on the endorsements. A majority of those members in good standing present and voting make an endorsement for office.

Please complete and return this questionnaire to Screening Committee Chair Katura Simmons at katuras414@yahoo.com, 1736 Wood Road, Cleveland Heights, 44121, no later than September 4th at 5:00 PM. This is a Word Document, and we request that you insert your responses in the appropriate spaces in the questionnaire.

Name: Cheryl Stephens
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By completing and returning this Candidate Questionnaire, I affirm the following:

1. I am a registered Democrat.
2. I agree to comply with the purpose of the Club as stated in Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution, that is:

The purpose of this organization shall be to provide a means by which residents of Cleveland Heights can organize to promote and develop the highest principles of the Democratic Party, to improve the administration of government, and to work for the good of all citizens. This organization shall endorse and support for public office all

candidates whose election will, in the judgment of the membership, best advance the Purpose. In pursuing its Purpose, this organization may also cooperate with the National, State, and County Democratic Committees, and pursue other programs of benefit to the community.

3. I agree not to openly oppose any Democratic nominee in a general partisan election.
4. I agree not to openly support any opponent of a Democratic nominee in a general partisan election.
5. I have not violated the above 1-4 during the past five (5) years.

If you cannot affirm as to numbers 2-4 please explain your reasoning here:

Please answer all of the following questions.

1. What do you hope to accomplish on behalf of the community as a member of the City Council?
I will work hard to help staff move progressively on community and economic development activities, management of the finances of the city, safety issues and improved transparency on the operations of the staff and city council.
2. What qualities, skills, insights, or perspectives do you possess which would be of value as a member of the City Council?
I have specialized skills in community and economic development finance that have been used for the growth of nonprofit, local, state, and federal government staff for project and community development in small and large settings. When people are willing to work with in a collaborative manner I am one of the first to help reach consensus and focus on the core issues for success of the organization.
3. What education, employment, and/or life experiences have prepared you to serve as a member of the City Council?
I have traveled the world since I was 18 months old, from Japan to Greece. I can communicate in multiple languages with people from various countries. I have a Masters of Public Administration and have worked for the city of Cleveland Heights as a staff person. But most of all I care about the quality of life of people in our community and will work hard with staff and my colleagues on council to help improve the quality of life where we have problems in the city by using my analytical decision making skills and experience in strategic planning, housing, financial analysis.
4. Describe your recent community, professional, charitable, and political involvement. Is there one situation where your participation made a difference?
Charitable/Community Work - In the last 10 years I have in volunteered and raised funds for the following organizations:

- **Susan G. Komen – America’s best known breast health education, screening, treatment, and support program operator**
- **Heritage Ohio - Ohio’s official historic preservation and Main Street organization**
- **Cleveland Public Theater - Pandemonium Fundraising Committee**
- **Cleveland Heights Happy 5K – For the Cleveland Heights Youth Recreation Fund**
Difference – Each year I help with the fund raising from sponsors for the 5K in order to increase the amount raised, typically a call from me takes the tone of “I personally am giving \$XXX. Can’t your organization/business do at least twice that or more?”

Professional Work –I am the Director of Acquisition, Disposition and Development at the Cuyahoga Land Bank. My team consists of 10 employees that report directly to me. Three (3) years ago I wrote a business plan that created a wholly owned subsidiary for the Land Bank. Today the department undertakes \$15,000,000 of acquisition and demolition of vacant abandoned and blighted properties in Cuyahoga County and the subsidiary generates a small profit for the Land Bank.

Difference – My team is the leading team for all comparable county wide land banks in the state of Ohio.

Political Involvement – I have been active in politics in Cleveland Heights and Cuyahoga County since I moved to the area. Most recently I have been on the board of Cleveland Heights Democrats and most years since 2010 I coordinate the food and miscellaneous stuff for the annual picnic and holiday event. As a City Council Member I have gradually taken on increasing levels of responsibility and leadership. In 2014 I became Vice Mayor and in 2016 Mayor. My goal when I ran for council in 2009 was just to “help council make Cleveland Heights more financially stable and get the community to undertake more economic development activities.”

Difference – In 2015 the City had to ask the residents and voters of the community for an income tax increase. I worked tirelessly with several members of council, volunteers from the fire department, concerned and caring residents and consultants to help get the tax increase passed.

5. How will you raise funds for your campaign?

Two fundraisers were held for my campaign and I have reached out individually to several business owners that I know personally for their support. I have been very successful in getting financial support for my campaign activities.

6. Following is a list of issues facing the City of Cleveland Heights. Please choose three or more and briefly describe how you propose to address the issues you select. You are welcome to write about a different issue, if you like, in addition to writing about at least three of the issues listed below. **I will answer: a, b, d, and f.**

- Spurring economic and community development** that grows our tax base and maintains Cleveland Heights as a vibrant community.
- What is your view on using **Tax-Increment Financing (TIFs)** to spur economic and community development? How does this view **effect the relationship with the Board of Education?**
- Reducing crime and enhancing the quality of life on our streets and in our neighborhoods.
- Reducing foreclosed, vacant, and abandoned housing**, and improving the housing options available to current and new residents.

- e. Maintaining and improving infrastructure, including resolving our water crisis and future as a master meter community in the Cleveland Water Department distribution system.
- f. **Achieving sufficient revenues to provide good city services.** For example, adequate safety forces, efficient garbage and rubbish collection, snow removal, etc.

A. Spurring economic and community development

I encourage economic development that will assist the city in growing our tax base. As costs increase for everything over time it is important to work regionally and maybe even nationally to have additional development take place in the community. The Master Plan that was completed earlier this year outlines several opportunities for business development, redevelopment of Severance Mall and the attraction of redevelopment to under utilized properties in the community. It is time for staff to become more aggressive in their pursuit of businesses for the community and city council to work with staff to get businesses and development that are outside the box into the community. We should build relationships with Team NEO and Jobs Ohio so that more economic development opportunities are sent our way.

B. What is your view of Tax Increment Financing (TIFs)

I believe TIFs are a good economic development tool. Every community that must compete for business and commercial real estate development should understand how the tool works and work with its school board to find ways to use the tool.

How does this view effect the relationship with the Board of Education?

It is import to reach an agreement with the BOE in advance of the issuance of a TIF for a project so that the development can move forward without problems. The City of Cleveland Heights and the BOE currently try to meet and review upcoming issues in advance of the finalization of projects so that there is little if any extended negative discussion about projects. I want to continue to have on going discussions about financing and projects so that municipal government and the school system work together to the benefit of Cleveland Heights.

D. Reducing foreclosed, vacant, and abandoned housing, and improving the housing

The actual work of reducing foreclosed, vacant and abandoned housing and improving housing stock in Cleveland Heights it done by the staff. Council can and should recommend to the City Manager. I recommend regular field inspections of neighborhoods and commercial districts to spot problems that can become public nuisances and have staff prepare a photographic history of the decline of the property. These photos will document why the property needs to receive some abatement of a nuisance like the demolition of a garage or porch that is collapsing.

One of the best ways to increase the value of houses that are declining in value is to build new houses that sell for higher prices. As more new house sell for higher prices the older homes increase in value and demand. Look at the value of homes in the Detroit Shoreway neighborhood of Cleveland, after 10 years of investment by private developers and the neighborhood groups supported by the City of Cleveland with tools such as tax abatement, low interest housing loans, and tax credits for historic rehabilitation there are really good

results in appraised values. Homes in the neighborhood previously selling for \$75,000 are now selling for \$150,000 to \$175,000.

We can have that renaissance, if we are willing to do more. We must pursue City Wide Tax Abatement for investments in existing homes of over \$25,000. We must pursue City Wide Tax Abatement for investment in new housing construction in excess of \$100,000. This tool alone will encourage additional residential development and attract the young residents this city needs for the future.

F. Achieving sufficient revenues to provide good city services.

Everything costs more over time. If we as a community invest now in aggressively attracting new businesses, redeveloping old building into new opportunities, and finding and offering financial incentives like TIF, Tax Abatement, and Low Interest Loans to businesses and developer we will begin to restore our financial reserves so that we can afford to continue to provide to our residents the quality of services that they expect to receive in a well respected community like Cleveland Heights.

Safety force staff, garbage collection, snow removal and services to our seniors and youth at the recreation pavilion all cost money. If we are to continue to provide high level services in each of these areas and more we must increase the value our real estate tax base. The key to this problem is economic development, good economic development, aggressive economic development that combines and understanding of what we need today, what is in our best interest for tomorrow and how we manager to achieve more in the future. Staff, City Council and the residents must continue to talk with each other on a regular basis, not just when there is a project. Transparency and input from residents must be the standard operating method so that everyone knows how things work in the community not just staff or members of council. We must always work together to move Cleveland Heights in to the best future we can have.