

## Cleveland Heights City Council Candidate Questionnaire

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1. What do you hope to accomplish on behalf of the community as a judge in Cleveland Heights?

If I am fortunate enough to be elected judge, I would improve and enhance community engagement, update the Court's software to make the Court more efficient, fair, and save the City money, and serve all of the citizens of Cleveland Heights by providing firm, fair, and impartial consideration to all who come before the Court.

Presently in our Court, there is a Youth Diversion Program, first established by then Councilwoman Janine Boyd and Judge A. Deane Buchanan. Programs like this that mentor our youth must be continued and strengthened, and that would happen if I am Judge. The Court, and specifically the Judge, must also be engaged and visible in our Community. If I am elected Judge, there will be recurring events where our residents, along with other stakeholders such as attorneys, mental health workers, building inspectors, and others, have the opportunity to talk in an informal setting with myself and other members of my Court. I have always been engaged in Cleveland Heights, and if I am elected Judge, that would surely continue.

If I am elected Judge, I will also make significant improvements to our Court's technology. Both the information and functionality of the Court's website, and the Court's internal docketing and file management system need to be updated. As an attorney who practices in the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court, I have seen how the lack of readily accessible information and the inability to pay for tickets or file documents electronically hinders the administration of justice. As an Acting Judge of the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court, I have seen how the internal docketing

and file management system creates inefficiencies and hinders the administration of justice. Updating and increasing the use of technology, paid for in large part through grants, will allow the Court to be more transparent, more efficient, and, in the long run, save the citizens of Cleveland Heights money.

Finally, I will serve all of the citizens of Cleveland Heights by providing firm, fair, and impartial consideration to all who come before the Court. What is most important is that the Judge of our Court uphold the rule of law and resolve disputes in a fair, efficient, and rational manner. This City and its citizens in large part made me who I am today, and as a result, I believe I am in a unique position to serve this City, with the core values that it cherishes, as Judge.

2. What qualities, skills, insights, or perspectives do you possess which would be of value as a judge in Cleveland Heights?

I was raised in Cleveland Heights. I delivered the Sun Press, bagged groceries at Russo's, and sold cars at Motorcars. The strong foundation built here in my youth and the progressive and diverse people who make up this City are why my wife and I have chosen to make it the home for ourselves and our two boys. That is why I would be dedicated to serving this community as a fair, honest, and trustworthy judge.

I have worked hard at every job that I have had, from bagging those groceries, to defending individuals after I opened my law practice in Cleveland Heights, to serving as Acting Judge of the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court. I have always been engaged in this community, from serving on the Cleveland Heights Cable Television Commission now more than a decade ago, to more recently serving on the Cleveland Heights Civil Service Commission, to graduating from the Cleveland Heights Citizens Police Academy. If I am elected judge, I will continue to work hard every day both on the bench, in one of the busiest single judge courts in Ohio, as well as off the bench, being visible and engaged in the community.

3. What education, employment, and/or life experiences have prepared you to serve as a judge in Cleveland Heights?

After graduating from the Case Western University School of Law, I opened my practice on Lee Road in Cleveland Heights. The first case that I tried was defending an individual in the very court I now wish to serve as judge. Since then, I have handled and tried cases in every municipal court in northeast Ohio and throughout our State.

A large part of my current practice includes assisting clients dealing with housing code violations. An often times overlooked and underappreciated role of any municipal court is dealing with housing code violations. These violations are brought against anyone from an owner-occupied individual that has fallen on hard times and cannot afford to maintain her home to, as we are seeing more and more, bank-owned properties and out-of-state absentee landlords that refuse to maintain their properties. In our Court, it is important for the Judge to have the experience necessary to deal with such cases within the limits of the law, and if there is a finding of guilt, responsibly determine a sentence commensurate with the crime and its impact on our City.

In addition to my years of practice as an attorney, I have also been serving as an Acting Judge of the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court. As an Acting Judge, I temporarily serve as Judge in the Court when Judge Buchanan is not available, hearing and deciding those same cases that I would hear and decide should I be elected Judge. That service has included everything from hearing and deciding forcible entry and detainer cases to conducting pretrials, setting bail, and sentencing defendants.

In my practice, I understand and value the rule of law. When I sit on the bench as Acting Judge, my focus is on the application of the law in a way that is fairly applied and enforced. Should I be elected Judge, I will endeavor to use my experiences to preserve the principles of justice and the rule of law in our Court.

4. Describe your recent community, professional and charitable, and involvement. Is there one situation where your participation made a difference?

I am a former member of the Cleveland Heights Cable Television Commission, the Recreation Advisory Board, and the Civil Service Commission. I have also served our schools as a member of the Roxboro Elementary School PTA. In these capacities, I have served the City directly for over a decade.

I am a graduate from the Cleveland Heights Citizens Police Academy. The Academy is taught by a number of highly trained law enforcement professionals who regularly teach both veteran police officers and police recruits. The Academy improved my understanding of our amazing Police Department and its operations.

I have mentored in the Cleveland schools through the 3Rs program set up by the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association. That program connects individuals in the

legal profession with high school students in Cleveland. Through classroom lessons, the program helps to foster an appreciation for and understanding of the rule of law and the Constitution, as well as sharing information about achieving goals after high school.

Finally, I am a former Executive Committee Member of the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party and a longtime member of this Club, having served as a Trustee, Secretary, Treasurer, and President. In those roles, I have had the opportunity to register voters, assist in endorsing Democratic candidates, and worked on both local and national campaigns.

I have no doubt that my participation in all of the activities listed above have made a difference, from showing a high school student the importance of our Constitution to helping candidates get elected so that they can then serve our Community. However, for me, it really is not about any one situation that made a difference. Instead, it is about how continued and sustained participation and showing up for other people always makes a difference and creates a positive impact on their lives.

5. How do you ensure your campaign is sustainable?

Having grown up here in Cleveland Heights, I had a strong base of supporters who knew me as a kid, have now watched me advocate on behalf of clients as an attorney, and have seen me serve this City for years. As a result, I have already been endorsed by State Representative Janine Boyd, Cuyahoga County Councilman Anthony T. Hairston, the majority of our City Council, Mayor Cheryl Stephens, Vice Mayor Jason Stein, and Councilwomen Mary Dunbar, Carol Roe, and Melissa Yasinow, as well as former members of City Council, Mayor Dennis Wilcox, Mayor Ed Kelley, Mayor Alan Rapoport, and Councilwoman Bonnie Caplan. In addition to the endorsements from many of our public servants, I have also been endorsed by a wide range of Cleveland Heights citizens, from Steve Presser and Alex Quintana to Melody Hart, Gary Benjamin, and Maria Wilkinson, just to name a few.

I have built on this base by walking the streets, knocking on doors, and talking to neighbors, from Brinkmore up on the northern end of Cleveland Heights to Delaware down on the southern end. I have attended numerous meetings and events throughout Cleveland Heights, from block parties and cleanups at Coventry Peace Park to the monthly meetings of Noble Neighbors.

I have always been active in Cleveland Heights. I have continued this activity now that I am running for office, and I will continue that engagement after I am elected Judge.

6. What do you see as a priority of issue(s) in Cleveland Heights? Pick your top three and briefly describe.

While Cleveland Heights, in many ways, exemplifies the qualities of a strong, diverse, and engaged community, there are a number of priority issues in our City, and specifically for our Court, that need to be improved. Three of those priority issues are housing, recidivism, and inequities in our judicial system.

One of the types of cases that are heard by the Municipal Court are the criminal cases brought by the City of Cleveland Heights involving violations of the City's building, zoning, fire, and health codes. It is crucial that our Court have a dedicated housing docket that treats these cases with the seriousness that they deserve. The Court should play a role in educating landlords, tenants, and property owners regarding their rights and responsibilities. If I am elected Judge, one of the improvements I would make would be to have a trained mediator available at eviction hearings to lessen the impact that those evictions have on our Community. I would also update the Court's Local Rules to require that landlords filing evictions be properly registered with the City. These changes, and changes like them, would help the Court in its ability to deal more fairly with the variety of housing issues that come before it.

Recidivism, or the tendency of an individual to repeat criminal behavior, is a measuring stick for our judiciary. The problem of recidivism occurs in seemingly harmless offenses such driving without a proper license, as well as more serious offenses such as drug abuse and domestic violence. Defendants need to be punished for their crime, but they also often times need to be given the tools necessary to change their path. There is no easy solution to this issue, and each case is unique. It is, however, my opinion that shipping the problems of Cleveland Heights off to another court is not the solution. Nor is simply promising specialized courts the answer, as they require extensive time and resources that our Court simply does not have. While it is certainly appropriate to explore these options, the solution, in the end, must be to build on those programs already in place and build and use the resources we already have in our community. This means things like improving the Court's driver's license suspension diversion program that helps individuals get out of the costly cycle that far too often disproportionately impacts the poor in our community. It also means building upon

and using the resources in our community like the Homer Repair Resource Center for homeowners having issues with housing code violation cases and the new Medical Center that is coming to Severance Circle for those suffering from drug dependency or violence.

Finally, there is the issue of inequities in our judicial system. Those inequities have become more and more apparent in recent years. Far too often income and race determine outcomes in our judicial system. If I am elected Judge I will focus on, and never shy away from, these issues. While there is certainly no simple solution, improved interactions and continual discussions between the Court, the City, and our Citizens are essential. All those with a stake in our City must be involved, and if I am elected Judge, I will pledge to be a force for always calling for those discussions and always pushing for those interactions, even when they are uncomfortable.