

Mpls Mayoral Questionnaire

Introduction:

Our population is aging, both in Minneapolis and nationwide. People over 60 now comprise more than 25% of the Minneapolis population, and people over 65 comprise nearly 11%. As part of this significant demographic, the Minneapolis DFL Senior Caucus is concerned about issues that affect the general community as well as issues that pertain specifically to them.

Candidate Name

DeWayne Davis

Candidate Email

info@dewayneforminneapolis.com

Candidate Phone

202-302-8939

Manager

Brandon McCollam

Manager email

Brandon.McCollam@gmail.com

Manager phone

952-843-8530

1. Priorities: What are your top three priorities for our city?

Our city is facing a number of challenges that are going to require a community-minded leader who is able to work with the city council. Here are three priorities that I'll focus on:

-Affordable Housing: We need more affordable housing across our city. Minneapolis has a housing supply issue, but we need to make sure we are bringing housing to every neighborhood that needs it, not just the North Loop or St. Anthony neighborhoods. We need to be investing in housing at the most affordable levels (0 - 30% of AMI) while continuing to develop much-needed units. Additionally, we need to be preserving the naturally affordable housing stock we do have to ensure we do not lose those units. Aging in place must remain viable.

-Building our neighborhoods to support our tax base: We need to build and maintain connected, flourishing, liveable neighborhoods in our city, including Downtown and Uptown. Each of our neighborhoods needs easy access to affordable food and housing with thriving small businesses and community spaces. We need to reinvent our tax model of relying on downtown commercial districts, and invest in our small businesses to diversify our tax base.

-Creating a community safety ecosystem: We need real community safety in our city. Residents and visitors of Minneapolis need police we can trust, reliable alternatives to armed officers, and response times that we can count on. Our police department needs real reform—not just boxes to be checked to please a judge.

2. Housing: What will you do to provide quality, affordable housing for all, including seniors? Since aging in place is often the best and most cost-effective way to house seniors, we are especially interested in your plan for how Minneapolis will achieve this.

Minneapolis is facing a significant shortage of supply – we need more housing to meet the needs of our current population and plan for growth.

However, we can't just rely on private development to meet our needs, and we can't keep offering tax breaks to private developers to create "affordable" housing that isn't affordable to our neighbors with the lowest incomes. We need to encourage public and nonprofit housing production across our city to make sure that those with the lowest incomes are also able to afford to live in our city in the neighborhoods they want to. As mayor, I would invest city dollars in programs to develop non-profit affordable housing, and I would work with the City Council to create a City Housing Trust Fund to offer support and low-interest loans to nonprofits and public developers to build small-scale and large-scale affordable housing across the city. The neighborhood reinvestment strategy from the 1990s and 2000s was a key strategy for helping keep affordable housing affordable, and we need to update that program to help people age in place. We want to retain our senior residents, and this would be an important strategy to do so.

But Minneapolis can't do it all alone. We need to work with our partners at the County and at the State to find larger sources of investment in non-profit and public funding, but we first need to show them that we're taking this issue seriously. I have over 20 years of experience in inter-government work and in getting things done on Capitol Hill, so I know what it takes to create inter-governmental solutions to some of our biggest problems.

We also have to make sure that housing that is currently affordable stays affordable. Rising property tax rates and the rising valuations of our properties are pricing out both homeowners and renters. It's a key issue for me to find ways of increasing our city's revenue through commercial taxes so that we don't come back to our neighbors asking for more property tax hikes. I will also work with the City Council to explore ways of protecting our low-income or fixed-income homeowners from property tax increases, including exceptions or deferments for seniors and increasing nonprofit support for needed renovations or upgrades so our seniors can age in place. Data suggests that seniors of color are among those least likely to file for the Homestead deduction and therefore face even heavier property tax burdens. I will initiate a new and stronger partnership with Hennepin County to ensure that all homeowners, with a focus on seniors, who are not currently taking advantage of the Homestead deduction, to do so.

3. Crime and public safety: How will you deter and fight crime, including juvenile crime, to keep us all — including seniors — safe? Please address how you will work to bring the Minneapolis Police Department up to the level required in the city charter.

We need a robust toolbox for community safety that decenters armed police response, and instead focuses on upstream solutions to crime, compassionate and well-resourced responses for people experiencing mental or chemical health crises, and coordinated and goal-oriented violence interruption.

When I co-led the City Community Safety Working Group, I worked with leaders and residents to offer our current mayor recommendations for increased violence prevention, better response to non-violent 911 calls, and deeper training and accountability for police. Some of these recommendations have been implemented – we now have 24/7 crisis response for mental health calls – but most of those recommendations were left on the table.

Here's what I'd focus on as mayor:

-Upstream solutions: Much of our crime comes from underinvestment in our communities. When folks' basic needs aren't being met, when our young people feel ignored and have nowhere to go, when people experiencing homelessness or addiction are criminalized instead of supported, crime goes up. As mayor, I'm committed to addressing the underlying causes of crime and investing city resources in supporting our neighbors.

-Recruiting different kinds of officers: If we want to hire more police officers that are better able to serve and protect our communities, we need to change who we hire and what we hire for. I've talked to teachers and social workers who have applied for the police academy and been rejected because they don't have the "right" background. I will work to change these practices so we value community service and prioritize people who bring new and important perspectives to the work.

-Coordinating with dispatchers: Our response times are too slow. Part of this is because we have too few police officers, but much of it is because of a lack of coordination across City and County departments. I'll work across these government agencies to make sure that the right support is showing up where it needs to quickly.

-Convene government and private sectors for youth employment: Across the nation, the most successful and proven tool to combat youth/juvenile crime is employment. I will work with our local government partners, the private sector, and philanthropy to invest in and scale up youth employment programs with an emphasis on career readiness (e.g., urban forestry, health care, green jobs) and prosocial life skills to prepare them for the careers of tomorrow.

4. Local economic development: Many of our community commercial corridors and hubs are struggling to recover from recent challenges and changes to our city. How will you approach economic development to provide needed jobs, products and services, and bring community commercial corridors and hubs back to life?

The COVID-19 pandemic changed how people work and live in our city.

We need to rethink what our commercial corridors and hubs look like. While it's important to build back Downtown as a hub of commerce and workers, we also need to be developing incentives in getting more people into those corridors for more reasons. Smaller lease spaces, conversion of commercial spaces into residential or entertainment spaces, and tax incentives for small and medium-sized businesses to grow in these spaces can help invigorate our Downtown.

But we also need to recognize that Downtown isn't the only place where commerce and growth can happen. I've talked to people in neighborhoods across the city who have tried to start small businesses and faced a city enterprise that has been incredibly difficult to navigate – some have even had to hire consultants to help them figure out the process. Investing in our entrepreneurs pays dividends, and as mayor, I will make sure that the city enterprise works for them as well as it does for our major corporations.

5. Financing the City: Because the city's commercial tax base is decreasing, and funding from the federal government is in decline, an increasing amount of the property tax levy is falling on residential properties. How will you craft a budget that meets the City's needs and also protects renters and homeowners, especially seniors, from property taxes that threaten to make their homes unaffordable?

We can't keep coming back to our homeowners and renters to make up the gaps in our city's funding.

We need to support a strong commercial base beyond Downtown by investing in our neighborhoods and supporting our small businesses. We also need to look at the types of tax incentives we're offering to large businesses and developers to make sure they're not coming at the expense of everyday renters and homeowners. We also need to be working collaboratively with the State and County to see where we can leverage shared investments and resources.

The reality is that with a possible recession and funding cuts from the Federal government, we're going to have to make some tough decisions about where we will prioritize. I've been clear about what my priorities are – building affordable housing and keeping already existing housing affordable, supporting our neighborhoods to grow our commercial tax base, and building an ecosystem of community safety that doesn't center armed police. As things shift, it'll be important for me to continue to listen to the citizens of Minneapolis and to work with our city council to understand what people's needs are and how we can support them.

6. Planning for the future: As the city's population grows and infrastructure ages, the city is facing increasing pressures on both built and natural environments, jeopardizing our health and quality of life. What is your plan, including financing, for addressing the pressure points from growth on aging infrastructure (water system, sanitation, waste disposal, streets) as well as our natural environment (tree canopy, air and water quality).

As we think about infrastructure, having good relationships with our other governmental partners is critically important. Our water systems and streets are connected to other municipalities and to County and State-operated entities. As mayor, I'll use my years of experience navigating infrastructure and intergovernmental relations to build and repair cooperatively with the governments around us.

We also know that the impacts of these infrastructure issues impact particular communities more than others. A senior on a fixed income may not have the funds available to replace lead water pipes, for example, and folks in North Minneapolis face heightened levels of pollution. As we take on these infrastructure projects, I will make sure that we're prioritizing groups who are most at risk of the effects of this aging infrastructure, and that we're not placing an undue burden on those who are most impacted.

As we update these infrastructure projects, we also have the opportunity to build on our reputation as a green place to live. Our green spaces and our clean water and air are central to who we are and part of what makes people want to live here. As mayor, I pledge to preserve the health of our green spaces, our air, and our water and to help restore the places that have been impacted by pollution or overdevelopment. I also commit to making sure that environmental impacts – including cumulative impacts – are taken into account in every infrastructure project that the city embarks on.

7. Good government: Minneapolis's good-government reputation has been damaged by headlines alleging fraud and abuse. What will you do to ensure integrity in how the City awards contracts and to prevent even the appearance of cronyism or conflicts of interest?

This is why it's so important for our city government to be working more collaboratively and to have a leader that people want to work for. When a Mayor is operating on their own, they miss out on important places of feedback and accountability that can keep these conflicts of interest from happening.

I have years of experiencing managing teams and bringing people together. As mayor, I will prioritize building a working relationship with the City Council to make sure that the decisions I make are clear and that I can hear and understand feedback on them. I don't know everything and certainly don't pretend to; I'll rely on their input and the input of others to make sure that I and my team are avoiding conflicts of interest.

I also want to bring back our city workforce in exile – we have so many community experts who can help oversee the important work of our city who don't want to work for the city when its leadership is this dysfunctional. With a good team of people in place, we can get back to good governance by creating better processes for these types of decisions and clarity and accountability around what we're asking our contractors and awardees to do.

For example, when I led the City Community Safety Working Group, one of the things we encouraged the Mayor to do was to create clear and measurable accountability for any group or nonprofit running a Violence Prevention program and to offer them oversight and technical assistance. We recognized that there were opportunities for potential conflicts of interest or awards being given to people or organizations who didn't have the training, capacity, or will to do the important work of de-escalating potentially eruptive situations. The current Mayor hasn't been able to get that recommendation done – as Mayor, I would.

8. Equity for seniors/ Increasing mobility: Recent urban designs limit some people's ability to get around the city to the services they need. How will you ensure that seniors and other mobility-impacted people are centered in the design of city streets and services?

When we think about making Minneapolis navigable and accessible, it's imperative to make sure we are taking into consideration the needs and desires of people with limited mobility. Part of this is making sure that there are available and accessible parking spaces for people who may need to use a car or van, and part of it is making sure that our transit system is fully accessible for people with limited mobility.

Metro Mobility is a great resource for people, but we also know that people struggle with long wait times or irregular schedules and drop-offs. I would work closely with the Metropolitan Council and devote city resources to supporting supplemental offerings from local nonprofits to make sure our seniors and folks with limited mobility are able to get where they need to go when they need to be there. I will also work with transit advocates to ensure we are coordinated in our focus on the Met Council for these needs.

But it's also important that we are taking these issues into consideration in the planning and execution of our streets and services. I commit to making sure that seniors and folks who are mobility-impacted have their voices heard by requiring that any proposed project meet a certain threshold of feedback from these committees.

9. Your relationship with seniors: Where do you get your understanding about issues of concern to seniors in Minneapolis? How will you consult with senior and disability groups such as the Minneapolis Chapter of the DFL Senior Caucus, Age Friendly and other senior advisory groups?

I'm honored to be supported by many seniors – including many members of the DFL Senior Caucus – who have shared their vision for Minneapolis with me. My experience with these folks has shown me that our seniors care deeply about the issues impacting them, but they also care deeply about the issues impacting other communities as well. Our seniors are some of the most vocal proponents of compassionate solutions to homelessness, support for young people, and community safety for all.

As Mayor, it will be my goal to be fully accountable to the people of this city, no matter their income, their ward, or their age. I'll continue to consult with seniors and with disability groups while I'm mayor because they are my constituents and their concerns are important. I will ensure that the outreach staff in the Office of the Mayor are specifically trained in best practices for community connection with our seniors and older adults. I'm grateful to live in a city with so many amazing groups to support and organize seniors and people with disabilities, and those groups, and the people they represent, will always have my ear and that of my staff.
