

**Preserve the Valley QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES FROM  
CANDIDATES for MAYOR OF AKRON**

**TARA MOSLEY**

**1.How do you propose to increase citizen engagement in government decision-making?  
(Not to exceed 500 words)**

Citizen engagement is only possible if we have city leadership that values curiosity, communication, and credibility.

- ***Curiosity.*** First, we must have city leaders who actually believe that the best ideas come from a diverse set of stakeholders. If we have an administration that simply goes through the motions of getting feedback from the community, then the result is a marketing campaign—which has its place, but is not the appropriate tool for engaging citizens. City leadership shouldn't start with an answer and try selling it to the people. Rather, it should start with a question and try getting buy-in on a solution from the *entire* community.
- ***Communication.*** Armed with the various viewpoints of the entire community on an issue, city leaders should then start building consensus for a solution. That is only possible with effective communication with the citizens and, critically, with their representatives. Too many times, legislation on major projects is brought to the City Council as a done deal. This approach is inefficient. Representatives of the various wards should be consulted from the beginning, so that they can communicate the viewpoints of their constituents to city leadership all along the process. Good communication from the start will help us avoid getting too involved in projects that are unacceptable to the community—which, as we have seen, will ultimately have the last word on any development in this city.
- ***Credibility.*** Finally, after city leadership has listened to the community and built consensus around a solution, it is important to execute on the solution. We do not need lip service. And we do not need leadership that says one thing in one room and another thing in another. We need leadership that has credibility. That way, people will be more likely to participate in the process in the future. If you do what you say you will, then people can trust you, and we can have a functioning government that truly engages the community. People will not participate in a government that is not accountable to them. But, if the people have an accountable government, there is no limit to what we can accomplish together.

**2. What steps do you believe should be taken to balance development with the protection of natural resources and the environment? (Not to exceed 500 words)**

Our development strategy needs to balance three priorities: 1. Preserving our natural resources; 2. Growing our city; and 3. Providing affordable housing to the people of Akron. As we do our best to strike the right balance between these competing priorities, we should keep in mind some basic facts.

First, this area has incredible parks and greenspace that can act as engines for our city's growth. People want to live in areas where nature is accessible. And Akron has historically succeeded in preserving large areas of wilderness that are quickly accessible from the city. That success, though, is under threat unless we have leaders who value our greenspaces. That is why I stood on the side of the activists against the White Pond Development and opposed drilling at the LaDue Reservoir. I believe that our natural resources are not standing in the way of our progress; they are the keys to our progress.

Second, we have a core in this city that is ready for development. I know, because in my time representing Ward 5, I oversaw hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in my community. Our inner city is ready to rebuild. And that should be where we focus our future development.

Third, and finally, we will never be able to grow our city without affordable housing. So, we should focus not just on building new housing, but also on rehabilitating our existing housing.

Ultimately, it is up to the community to decide the best way to strike the right balance between our development priorities. So, as I discussed above, we should make these decisions with community input. Slowing down to listen will not slow down our city's positive growth. Indeed, it is the only way we can grow. It's on us as leaders to hear our residents, so we can do just that, creating a future where the city can thrive from North Akron, East Akron to West and South Akron and everywhere in between.

**3. Would you amend the current 15 year property tax abatement program to incentivize redevelopment in the urban core and remove incentives to greenspace development?**

Yes.

**4. Do you support 100% conservation for the 45 acres of Theiss Woods? Yes or No**

Yes.

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## **JOSHUA SCHAFFER**

### **1. How do you propose to increase citizen engagement in government decision-making? (Not to exceed 500 words)**

How to address citizen engagement: Part of what drove me to be mayor, was the lack of access to the mayor and his staff. I have requested several meetings over 6 years, and never did the mayor agree to one. Seeing the need for access, I built a campaign for a mayor that will constantly interact with the people I serve and those who serve me. I will have an open office policy, where I take meetings with citizens in a one on one setting in my office once weekly. Further, I have committed to working hourly shifts once a month. For example, you may see me, the mayor, picking up your trash or mowing the lawn at the park. In order for citizens to be engaged, they have to build trust and relationships with their leader. No other candidate has agreed to the same.

Citizens will engage with government when government positively engages with people. We need to do a better job reaching out to university students. Tens of thousands of students who live on and off campus, are eligible voters. Voter law says that you must vote where you reside 30 days before the election. Those are young, energetic residents with values that aren't represented in municipal government. We should engage people of all communities, ages, races, to make sure as many people as possible vote, and get energized about their issues. In closing, the government must be the one to take initiative to energize people. We all have things we care about, and we just need to build trust and momentum around each individual's values.

### **2. What steps do you believe should be taken to balance development with the protection of natural resources and the environment? (Not to exceed 500 words)**

How to balance development and environmentalism: To begin, my agenda calls for the largest investment in infrastructure our city has ever seen. By investing in a solar and wind municipal power plant, we energize the future of our city. We will create jobs in renewable energy, and aim to be a carbon neutral city. We should build affordable housing in areas that are already paved or otherwise cleared, and reforest other properties owned and obtained by the city or land bank. Land bank nearly gives away free properties. If the city invests in building new housing, where previous housing was demolished, or rehabbing homes, we can protect new land from development. Other abandoned public lands will be used for reforestation, acquisition for parks, community gardens and orchards, and for our new solar and wind infrastructure! My thriving green jobs economy will build prosperity for all, increase residency, increase tax base, decrease unemployment, increase wages, and balance land management with affordable housing!

### **3. Would you amend the current 15 year property tax abatement program to incentivize redevelopment in the urban core and remove incentives to greenspace development?**

### **4. Do you support 100% conservation for the 45 acres of Theiss Woods? Yes or No.**

3 & 4 Answer Yes to both of the questions.

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## **SHAMMAS MALIK**

### **1. How do you propose to increase citizen engagement in government decision-making? (Not to exceed 500 words)**

Residents absolutely should see their voices reflected back to them in policy decisions. Too often in our city, decisions are made by a handful of people, or even one person, with very little community input. And when residents push back, they are either ignored or brought in so late in the process that there is really no meaningful way for them to give input. I've seen this happen time and again, like with Akron's \$145 million in ARPA funding, where City Council was kept from participating in deciding where those dollars should be spent, and with the White Pond development, where hundreds of residents voiced concern, and the City pushed this forward despite those concerns.

I envision a different form of city government, where every one of our 190,000 residents feels empowered to be part of deciding the future of our city. Community involvement and engagement, especially in redevelopment projects, is critical. This requires a new type of leadership, and I've been proud to lead in partnership with Preserve the Valley on these types of conversations, especially on Theiss Woods. As Mayor, I would continue making community engagement in development decisions a priority and be proactive about seeking resident input at the beginning of the planning process.

### **2. What steps do you believe should be taken to balance development with the protection of natural resources and the environment? (Not to exceed 500 words)**

Our city absolutely needs more housing, especially more affordable housing, and development must be balanced with preserving our green spaces. As Mayor, I would prioritize development on the thousands of vacant lots scattered throughout our neighborhoods to address blight, provide more homes to residents, and rebuild neighborhoods that are struggling.

On a broader scale, Akron needs a reimagined vision for environmental sustainability for our city's future that addresses not only development, but also the other facets of local government that impact our environment. More than a decade ago, Akron's city government put together a bold environmental action plan, but since then, we've lacked strategic direction on this issue.

Our Living Together plan will get us back on track by joining Power a Clean Future Ohio, a coalition of statewide, nonpartisan organizations that is currently working with every other major Ohio city, providing free services to advance clean energy and the environment. We also will hire a cabinet-level staff member focused on environmental sustainability who will coordinate efforts across city government, from electrifying our fleet of city vehicles, to improving our recycling process, reversing the loss of our tree canopy, creating green building standards for new development, examining Akron's land use policies and regulations, and finally, tracking our city government emissions and setting a goal for reductions. Additionally, through our Working Together plan, we will prioritize green energy jobs as a key component of building our economy of the future.

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Yes

**4. Do you support 100% conservation for the 45 acres of Theiss Woods? Yes or No**

Yes

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**KEITH MILLS**

**1. How do you propose to increase citizen engagement in government decision-making? (Not to exceed 500 words).**

I believe the interaction between citizens and their government is a relationship, and good relationships are based on good communication. The best way to encourage good communication would be for our elected officials to get out and meet those that they serve. I believe one way to get that to happen would be to introduce incentives for our elected representatives and citizens alike to get out and meet each other. Incentives such as having rewards offered through our app or developing another, where if you spot your representative and take a picture with them, you could send it in and potentially get a free water bill that month or maybe tickets to a Rubber Ducks game. Maybe dinner for two downtown paid for by the city. We will have an active presence on Facebook and Instagram. We will coordinate with other local agencies and service providers to raise awareness that we as representatives are interested in active feedback. Another tool we could use would be surveys. Citizens could fill them out and potentially get rewarded. I will personally lead by example and I will be at as many events as possible and reach out to citizens personally.

**2. What steps do you believe should be taken to balance development with the protection of natural resources and the environment? (Not to exceed 500 words)**

In general I believe that the needs and wants of our environment are just as, if not more, important than our own. I believe forward looking studies should be conducted in order to gauge what effects a development will have on our environment. Then take into account what type of development it will be, a housing development vs a smelter for instance, and determine if there are ways to lower or limit its effects on the environment. Then if that is impossible, rethink the development. I believe the environment should be assessed prior to anything. How can we flourish if our home (Earth) isn't flourishing as well.

**3. Would you amend the current 15 year property tax abatement program to incentivize redevelopment in the urban core and remove incentives to greenspace development?**

Yes

#### **4. Do you support 100% conservation for the 45 acres of Theiss Woods? Yes or No**

Yes

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**JEFF WILHITE**

#### **1.How do you propose to increase citizen engagement in government decision making? (Not to exceed 500 words)**

Citizen engagement in government is important because it not only enables the government leaders to prioritize and set an agenda based on the will of those who elected them, but it also should result in a more comprehensive and equitable approach to decision-making and policy development. No surprises, misinformation, or distrust. Citizen involvement has practical, philosophical, and ethical benefits. It will allow us to adhere to democratic principles, create more substantive decisions and outcomes, identify problems needing attention and resolution, and enhance future problem-solving abilities.

I would begin by engaging the public in decisions as they are made. Early identification of pending issues leads to more substantive outcomes with better solutions. It is worth the investment of time for government to engage with citizens, community groups and organizations, as it leads to a sense of investment, ownership and achievement. If our citizens feel valued and included, then we will have a government that truly represents everyone.

To achieve citizen engagement, I would first build community trust and confidence through open conversations and sharing of information and data. Second, I would engage in effective listening, so we understand exactly the concerns/issues of our citizenry and collaboratively develop ways to address those concerns/issues. And third, I would develop a set of plans based on the input and priorities resulting from that citizen engagement.

#### **2.What steps do you believe should be taken to balance development with the protection of natural resources and the environment? (Not to exceed 500 words)**

My first step in balancing development and natural resources and environments would be to develop a comprehensive land-use plan that focuses on the redevelopment and reuse of previously developed land in favor of preserving our limited green spaces. Any future development of green spaces would have to adhere to standards that would be developed with community engagement and citizen input. While we do not want to squash development entirely, we want to ensure that we are growing and developing our city in a smart, responsible and economically-friendly manner for the benefit of our children and grandchildren.

Secondly, as development opportunities arise, my administration will be open, transparent and communicative with the surrounding neighborhood and others that may be impacted by the development. And we will require developers to incorporate that input into their development plans.

Third, while development is often times beneficial, we must also obtain community benefits from that development, including, but not limited to environmental/green-space set-asides, employment of local and underserved populations, LEED-certified buildings and contributions from developers to offset the impacts of their development on local infrastructure. As development opportunities arise, my administration will make sure that developers contribute these, and other potential benefits to the community as part of their projects.

Fourth, we need to recalibrate the resources of our City to target redevelopment over new greenfield development. The City's "tool-box" of incentives and assistance should be leveraged more heavily to repurpose and reuse property that was developed decades ago that has fallen into disrepair. By doing so, we are able to accomplish the dual purpose of removing blight from our community while also preserving our limited natural spaces.

**3. Would you amend the current 15 year property tax abatement program to incentivize redevelopment in the urban core and remove incentives to greenspace development?**

Yes.

**4. Do you support 100% conservation for the 45 acres of Theiss Woods? Yes or No**

Yes.

**THE FOLLOWING MAYORAL CANDIDATES DID NOT SUBMIT RESPONSES:**

Marco Sommerville

Mark Greer