**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Robert Murphy

Ward: 39th

Occupation: Architect

Education: BA in History, Antioch College

MArch, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

Previous political and civic experience:

Aldermanic campaign staff, 2011

Founding member of Jefferson Park Sunday Market

45th Ward Zoning Advisory Committee

President, Forest Glen community association, 2011-14

Founding member, leader in Fair Allocations in Runways (FAiR) Coalition

**1) City Pensions**

Chicago's fire and police pensions are greatly underfunded, and the city is required by the state to make a $550 million payment into the pension funds by the end of 2015. Do you support restructuring the pension systems, inevitably reducing benefits, to put the funds on sound financial footing?

Yes or No:

No.

Please Explain:

I think the city needs to first pledge to meet its obligations. I also think that solutions need to be negotiated, rather than shoved down the throats of all parties. It is critical to any long-term solution that there is buy-in by everyone. I think that possible solutions like raising the age for eligibility for full pension benefits, with allowances for first responders and for employees retiring in the near future; and new revenue sources, favoring progressive taxes and true user fees, instead of the more regressive property tax sources, will need to be tapped quickly. I don’t think the solutions will be easy or cheap since previous administrations, with the support of my incumbent alderman, have kicked the can down the road so far over the last 20 years that addressing the issue immediately and transparently is my first job as a new alderman. Ald. Laurino has put taxpayers on the hook for over $37 billion in underfunded pensions alone, and she has not offered any solutions to fix the problems she created.

Chicago's pension systems for municipal workers and laborers already have been restructured, reducing benefits, but the city has yet to identify where it will find the revenue to sufficiently fund those systems. Under what circumstances would you support a property tax increase to raise the needed revenue for the fire and police pensions and/or the municipal workers and laborers pensions?

As a last resort. Some restructuring needs to be looked at, but it needs to be done through negotiation with the city workers who have kept their parts of the agreements they made with the city, paid their parts of the pension payments to the city funds, but have basically been lied to by the city.  And the City Council needs to be honest with the citizens and businesses of Chicago about how bad of a situation we are in.  Calling this latest budget, that does nothing to address these unfunded liabilities and lack of significant new revenue sources to help fill the holes in our city pension funds “A good budget, a happy budget”, like my incumbent Alderman did in the press, is more of the same dissembling that’s put us in this situation, and that will change when I’m Alderman.

It is very possible that City Hall will try to sell off assets like the Water Department in order to meet this desperate situation. Selling off of public assets needs to halt. I will fight tooth and nail against this as Chicago taxpayers gain little in the short-run by these stop-gap sell-offs and lose a great deal in the long-run. City finances need to be restructured, and captured city funds like surplus TIFs and bad credit swap deals need to be unwound and brought back into the budget. City workers, police, fireman, taxpayers have all done their part and met their obligations but past administrations and a rubber stamp City Council have failed them terribly and left the rest of us holding the bag.

**2) Chicago Public Schools pensions**

Large and growing payments required to keep the Chicago Teachers’ Pension Fund solvent are squeezing CPS' budget, forcing cuts elsewhere and limiting investment. The Chicago Board of Education has increased property taxes, but it is not enough to keep up with the high annual costs. What measures do you support to ensure a solvent retirement system and to improve the district's finances?

Teachers’ pensions are city pensions just the same as police, fire and other city workers and all these need to be addressed in similar ways and with the same transparency as I discussed above. CPS is being squeezed both because of internal blunders and because the state is in such bad shape and not meetings its obligations. There has been no clear direction to put CPS on a solid foundation for at least the last five years. Overfunded TIFs continue to drain funds, pension payments have been kicked down the road for years, and the current administration is pushing hard to create charter schools, especially in poorer neighborhoods, and thereby forcing the closure of so many of them. Seeking return of the $100M in swap losses through “Bad Faith” lawsuits would be a good place to start, as would revenue bonds rather than outright sale of assets.

**3) Revenue**  
  
In light of the financial issues discussed above, do you support any or all of the following measures, each of which would require**,** at a minimum, approval by the Illinois Legislature?

\* A statewide expansion of the sales tax base to include more consumer services

Yes or No: Yes, though I do not like the regressive nature of this tax.

\* A tax on non-Chicago residents who work in the city

Yes or No: As a border alderman, with housing stock that’s been described as “suburban like”, I might be one of the few alderman who might be helped by this tax, and if the plane noise abates, it might bring up property values in my neighborhood, but I understand the drawbacks in the rest of the city.

\* A tax on electronic financial transactions on Chicago’s trading exchanges, known as the “LaSalle Street tax”

Yes or No: No. Highly conditional on what this would actually look like.

Please explain your views, if you wish, on any of these three revenue-generating measures.

Willing to discuss the LaSalle Street tax but we cannot assume that the trading business is as tied to brick and mortar as it used to be and we could wake up to find the money we hoped to gain turns into a complete loss of an industry. When the business is on servers, and the exchange can move that business with a switch to the suburbs or overseas, both places they already have back-up servers, we might lose the jobs already here and not gain ANY tax dollars.

**4) Crime**

Do you support hiring more police officers to combat crime and gun violence in Chicago?

Yes or No: Yes.

Please explain: I support and advocate for the hiring of 1,000 new police officers to begin to make up for unaddressed attrition that has been going on for years. Mayor Emanuel promised to do this when he ran the first time; it was a good idea then and an even better and more necessary one now.

What legislation in Springfield would you support to try to stem the flow of illegal guns into Chicago?

It is important to realize that neither Chicago nor Illinois is an island, the illegal gun trade is a national problem with local implications. I support responsible gun ownership. The biggest source of the problem with illegal weapons is the unregulated gun shows and unscrupulous middle-men. While homicides are dramatically down, Chicago has still seen over 10,000 shootings since 2011, an incredible number that is worrying just on its own. I would support measures to close loopholes, regulate all gun sales and crack down on those who sell weapons illegally, perhaps putting them on the hook for crimes committed with their guns.

**5) Elected school board**

An advisory referendum on switching Chicago to an elected school board, rather than an appointed board, is expected to be on the ballot in more than 30 wards on Feb. 24. Currently, the mayor appoints all seven board membersand the Schools CEO. Do you support a change to an elected school board?

Yes or No: Yes.

Please explain:

The fact that this is not a city-wide ballot initiative is part and parcel of the current mayor and City Council not really interested in hearing what voters want. Being against it is one thing, being against voters having a choice is frankly a clear disrespect for democracy.

The board as it is currently constituted is not independent and does not give the voters or tax payers any checks and balances on executive overreach. The scandals seem to mount daily with the board and so much of what it does is simply a rubber stamp. How can not a single board member attend the community meetings that were held for those schools that were closed down last year and yet pretend to represent the interests of all communities? How can no one been fired for the $100M swap losses? Chicago voters and parents deserve to have a real say in how policy is set, money is allocated and what direction the education of their children should be going. Right now it all comes down from the mayor – this has not served Chicago families well.

**6) Tax-increment financing districts**

TIFs are the primary economic development tool of the city. In a TIF district, taxes from the growth in property values are set aside for 23 years to be used for public projects and private development. Do you support increasing the annual TIF surplus that the mayor and the City Council have declared in each of the last few years, money that goes to the schools and other city agencies?

Yes or No: Yes.

What reforms would you propose for the city's TIF program?

Much needs reforming in the TIF program. I support the development and neighborhood improvement a well-directed TIF can bring. Right now, TIFs are too unregulated and too broad – too many TIFs exist that should not and some are around for too long accomplishing little or nothing. There needs to be a real protocol reform for engaging neighbors and communities in how TIF money is used and will be used going forward, how projects are approved and real transparency in how money has been used and how much money is coming in. There needs to be a much easier way to sunset a non-performing TIF. The city has made efforts to be more transparent, but it is still nearly impossible to find out how TIF money has been used, unless you are a forensic account willing to file a ton of FOIAs. The current alderman has never once engaged surrounding communities in how TIF money should be, could be, used, but instead funded her pet projects which have not lead to any discernible development in the ward over the past 20 years.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

What would you do as alderman to boost economic development in your ward, and bring jobs to your community?

The 39th Ward is essentially a bedroom community, that includes a fairly wealthy demographic, as well as a light industrial strip that runs down our center. I’ll seek to increase and harness community and resident input on what types of retail and service businesses are desired and seek to have local businesses incubated to help join the chain businesses in our several local shopping districts. I would use TIF funds to encourage development in the walkable shopping districts like Bryn Mawr in the east, Devon in the north, and Lawrence in the south to increase local foot traffic, and stop local retail funds from traveling to places like Lincolnwood and Niles, where they head now. I would do that by establishing a local Zoning Advisory Committee to solicit and capture community, business, chamber and taxpayer input in how development decisions are made in the Ward. This is not done now, and despite the ward’s demographics, a lack of local retailers has been one of the biggest complaints I’ve heard from local residents, and a lack of help developing businesses is one of the complaints I’ve heard from local business owners. In the light industrial part of the ward, I propose partnering with the City Colleges to help provide pre-trained employees with the exact job skills required by these light industrial companies, and add contingency requirements on the city funds already used supporting this industrial area, and other incentives an Alderman should bring to increase hiring of local talent. I will be an active alderman seeking new business investment and resident feedback on moving the Ward forward. I will expand the notion of what it means to partner with businesses by working to protect them from the worst effects of large city and utility projects by working with agencies to ensure that these months-long projects are staged to have the smallest possible impact on their operations. Small businesses are the ones most affected by site-specific projects and loss of income from making streets impassable or removing parking for months on end, and can and do put them out of business.

**8) Size of the Chicago City Council**

The City Council has 50 members, but civic groups and other regularly argue for reducing the size of the Council. What should the size of the Council be? Please provide a specific number. And why?

I’m open to it, but I think the very limited monetary savings that reducing the amount of Aldermen and women would yield (per taxpayer, it’s around two dollars a year, if you reduce the council by half), coupled with fact that a large part of their staffs would likely be retained to properly service the constituents; vs the reduction in service and access that a properly run Aldermanic service office should give and the greater likelihood that a larger ward would make it much harder for a truly independent candidate to compete and give the neighborhood a choice for a different way to address their problems means that; at least in my opinion, the cost/benefit analysis skews heavily toward a smaller constituency and a more easily defeated, and hopefully, therefore, more responsive elected official.

**9) A Chicago casino**

Do you support, in general concept, establishing a gambling casino in Chicago?

Yes or No: Yes.

Please explain:

In very general concept I do not oppose a casino per se. I would see a casino as a possible amenity to the city, an additional, smallish, attraction. I do not see a casino, or casinos as a remedy to our fiscal problems, our budget deficit or our underfunded schools. Gambling is essentially a very regressive tax and not one to be used to significantly fund our budget. I might be more open to slots or poker machines at O’Hare, but could see many downsides to that as well.

**10) Red light and speed cameras**

Does the city have an acceptable number of red light and speed cameras currently, and are they properly employed?

Yes or No: No

Please explain:

There are many ways to actually slow down traffic, and shortening yellow lights is not one of them. That the whole program is corrupt and scandal-ridden is no surprise: these programs were sold on a false premise of safety. Since they are all about generating maximum revenue they are simply another way to punish citizens for city living. There could be very good locations for some of these, in areas where safety can actually be impacted, but that has not be goal thus far and so it is largely a failure.

**11) Ward issues**

What are the top three issues in your ward — the ones you talk about most on the campaign trail?

Lack of economic development

Too much airplane traffic

Ward office deaf or closed off (doesn’t listen)