

2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: Patrick D. Thompson

Ward: 11th Ward

Occupation: Real estate and business transaction attorney

Education: J.D., The John Marshall Law School

B.A., St. Mary's University of Minnesota

St. Ignatius College Prep High School

Nativity of Our Lord Grade School

Previous political and civic experience:

Commissioner for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Board member for the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence

Board member for the Valentine Boys and Girls Club of Chicago

Secretary for the South Loop Chamber of Commerce

Board Chair and former tutor, Aquinas Literacy Center

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: We must address the pension issue.

Please Explain:

I understand that the City has significant obligations that it must meet in the near future.

If elected, I will draw upon my experience as a commissioner at the MWRD, where we have been leaders on pension reform by adopting a disciplined approach to meeting these obligations without adversely impacting our operational mission. The MWRD approved a pension reform package in 2011, one that I supported, and I have voted every year since to meet our obligation.

In the ongoing discussion of how to best reform our pension system, everything needs to be on the table. Every stakeholder needs to be willing to make sacrifices in order to get our city

back on sound financial footing. We need to find new streams of revenue that would be strictly dedicated to funding pensions for retirees. We must also be conscious of the burden that already exists on our tax base.

However, I do not support reforms that will place an undue burden on current retirees who now face dramatically increased healthcare costs and, due to their age or health situation are unable to work or find the income to pay for increasing costs.

I will also be watching closely as the Illinois Supreme Court considers the lawsuit brought on challenging the pension bill that was enacted one year ago. It is my hope that the Supreme Court provides ample guidance on how we can proceed in a way that delivers on our obligation to retirees while also putting the state on sound financial footing going forward.

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?

I think that we must look to the Illinois Supreme Court for direction as it relates to the municipal workers' and laborers' pension.

The police and fire pensions are governed by a different statute that is more restrictive to the City. The City must be open to all revenue sources, as well as creating new revenue opportunities whether that be TIF, sales tax, real estate tax, etc.

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?

Again, we need to have an honest discussion with all stakeholders to work on a solution. We must honor our commitments to retirees while providing certainty to current and incoming employees. We must again be conscious of the burden on our existing tax base. We must also continue to explore opportunities for efficiency and accountability. Finally, we also need to develop new revenue sources.

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. Everything should be open for discussion.

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

Yes or No: Yes. But we must be careful not to drive businesses away from Chicago.

* A tax on electronic financial transactions on Chicago's trading exchanges, known as the "LaSalle Street tax"

Yes or No: Yes. However, it needs to be structured in a way that doesn't motivate the exchanges from relocating.

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

It is not enough for us to simply tax our way out of this problem. We need to identify new, non-tax revenue sources to satisfy our fiscal and operational obligations. I am proud of the work we have done at the MWRD to create a program that allows us to resell resources like gray water, phosphorus, methane gas and biosolids that are extracted during our water treatment process. This program has received praise from the Civic Federation citing the initiative as a "commendable long-term planning."

4) Crime

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

Yes or No: Yes.

Please explain:

Undeniably, more police officers working in all communities will increase safety and reduce crime. I fully support putting the right resources where violent crime plagues communities and thwarts economic development. But flooding hotspots with officers should not come at the expense of a full complement of officers working in other communities.

Clearly, we need to put more resources into high crime areas, but we also should ensure that all communities have more than adequate police coverage. We can and should be able to do both.

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

I have worked since 1995 as a board member for the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence, where we advocate for a number of measures to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. We have made an impact, but more work needs to be done.

We currently have a patchwork approach to regulating firearms dealers that just invites abuse by those seeking to purchase guns for illegal use. The City already has regulations in place. However, we need consistent regulations that are applied evenly on a statewide basis. We know, for example, that suburban firearms dealers are not subject to the same strict

regulations as dealers located in Chicago. We also know that, according to a recent City of Chicago study, a few suburban firearms dealers supply a large number of firearms that are eventually used and recovered in crimes that happen in Chicago. Applying a consistent set of rules to all dealers will bring uniformity to regulations and make it that much more difficult for criminals to access firearms.

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 members and the Schools CEO. Do you support a change to an elected school board?

Yes or No: I support elected local school councils and an appointed school board.

Please explain:

I am open to learning more about the benefits an elected school board can deliver to our schools.

While residents are certainly concerned with the health of the system as a whole, we know that their number one concern is the health and effectiveness of the schools their children attend. Parents want to make sure their schools are on the right track. That's why I support giving them a voice in electing community members and leaders to local school councils.

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: We can and should look at the entire TIF cycle. Eventually, these districts will generate more increment than is allocated to project and that increment should be distributed in a fair and equitable manner.

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

We need to be more judicious with respect to how we designate TIF districts. TIF were initially intended to lift up blighted areas and incent developers to invest in those areas. Let's look at ways to use TIF for this purpose instead of using solely to lure for development in already thriving areas.

7) Neighborhood economic development

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

We have an opportunity to develop a vibrant, walkable retail district on Halsted Street. I hear from residents all the time that they would love to see more retail activity on Halsted. They would like more opportunities to shop locally. I couldn't agree more. People should be able to walk throughout their community to get errands done, do some shopping in boutiques and have a nice meal all within a well-planned space that serves as a catalyst for local commerce, jobs and economic development.

We also have a great opportunity with the Stockyard Industrial Park and currently available land in other areas in the Ward to expand current businesses and attract new ones. We need to capitalize on the momentum that has been established with the expansion of South Chicago Packaging and the relocation of ComEd and Vienna Beef to the Ward.

As a member of the South Loop Chamber of Commerce, I know how to attract and retain businesses. As a real estate attorney, I have been involved with millions of dollars of development and I understand the importance of zoning and how to effectively utilize the government tools to incentivize development. I also know how to identify and solve the challenges companies face when trying to relocate and/or expand.

Finally, as a business owner, I am keenly aware of how important decisive leadership is because business will not allow government to stop progress.

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?

Chicagoans deserve representatives in City Council who know their concerns well. I know that 11th Ward residents expect their alderman to know the Ward down to every alley, storefront and playground. While some would argue that fewer aldermen would generate cost savings, I believe that the savings would come at the long-term expense of good, solid, personal representation.

If we have fewer aldermen representing larger swaths of the city, I would be concerned that the connection between the alderman's office and the community he/she serves would be diminished significantly. If we have an alderman serving thousands of additional residents and households, I would be concerned that their voice in local affairs would be muted, the critical delivery of city services would become harder to manage and an alderman's ability to develop deep, meaningful relationships with the people he/she serves would be hampered.

9) A Chicago casino

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

Yes or No: Conceptually, yes.

Please explain:

Whenever we have an opportunity to create jobs, boost our convention and tourism profile and deliver economic impact to our neighborhoods and our schools, we are obligated to give it due consideration.

In general, I am supportive of a Chicago casino. A casino in Chicago can serve as a catalyst for economic development and job growth. Furthermore, a new casino can potentially generate a new revenue stream for the City. However, it needs to be done the right way, with the right operator and in the right community where it can be used as a means to create additional economic development opportunities.

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: Yes, provided that the cameras are intended to enhance safety.

Please explain:

I am supportive of the traffic light camera program because of its potential to improve traffic, reduce accidents and save lives. The program needs to be administered with public safety as the number one priority.

However, in continuing the initiative, we need to make sure it is being done for the right reasons. Recent news media reports that the City may have been altering timing of lights in order to increase revenue undermine the program's core purpose, which is to make our busiest intersections safer.

11) Ward issues

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

During this campaign, I have knocked on hundreds of doors and have already contacted thousands of voters. The three main issues that come up in those conversations are: public safety, education and economic development.

We need to continue to encourage the partnership between the Chicago Police Department and residents to maintain and improve the safety of every neighborhood.

We need to support all of our schools, teachers and families by improving facilities in order to create safe, healthy and productive learning environments that are conducive to learning.

Finally, Halsted Street is the commercial spine of the 11th Ward, running from Harrison St. on the north to 49th St. on the south. We need to build vibrant commercial opportunities throughout the Ward while also working with businesses to create employment opportunities for our residents.

I grew up in the 11th Ward and chose to raise my family here because it is a safe, tight-knit, diverse community that will give my children all that city life has to offer.

Job one for any alderman is making sure basic city service are being delivered effectively and efficiently. My experience as a property manager of commercial real estate was good preparation for coordinating and responding to constituent service requests.

If I am elected alderman, I will make customer service a priority by being accessible and responsive to all residents. I will encourage frequent, two-way communication so I am not just reacting to resident needs, but anticipating them.

11th Ward residents want to be sure that their families and their homes are safe. They want quality schools for their children. They want to improve our roads, viaducts and infrastructure. They want ample retail, recreational and entertainment opportunities in their communities.

