**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: **Natashia Holmes**

Ward: **7**

Occupation: **Alderman, 7th Ward, City of Chicago**

Education: **B.S. from Alabama State University, College of Education; Master of Community Planning from Auburn University, College of Architecture, Design and Construction; J.D. from the Illinois Institute of Technology’s Chicago-Kent College of Law. Admitted to practice law in the State of Illinois in November 2014.**

Previous political and civic experience:

* University Of Illinois at Chicago, Institute for Environmental Science and Policy, External Advisory Board (*2010 – 2013*)
* Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Paideia Academy Local School Council, (*Community Rep., 2008-2010*)
* 2651 E. 74th St. Condominium Association, *(President, 2006 – 2008; Board Advisor, 2008 – 2009; President, 2009-present)*
* Metropolitan Conference on Public Transportation Research, *(President, 2004 - 2006)*
* Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated

**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:

Please Explain:

**There will need to be a series of solutions to resolve the pension crisis. I will support a solution that is comprehensive, treats workers fairly, and ensures that citizens won’t have to revisit this decision again once we have asked them to make sacrifices to accommodate a solution.**

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?

**First we must explore every option for increasing funding to meet our pension obligations before considering higher taxes and fees. Let’s cut the fat and waste from our budget, then decide whether new revenues are needed.**

**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?

**There will need to be a series of solutions to resolve the pension crisis. I will support a solution that is comprehensive, treats workers fairly, and ensures that citizens won’t have to revisit this decision again once we have asked them to make sacrifices to accommodate a solution.**

**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, but the extension to services must reasonable and something that could be applicable statewide and would not be a detriment to only those services offered in the City of Chicago.**

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

Yes or No:

**No**

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

Yes or No:

**Not at this time, I would need to further understand what the impact of this tax would have on the trading exchanges and versus the potential benefits gained by residents.**

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

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No:

Please explain:

**Improvement in public safety is on the shoulders of all Chicagoans. The police have the responsibility to enforce the law, fight crime, and get perpetrators off our streets; however residents also have a responsibility too – neighbors must be willing to stand-up collectively and not allow activities to take place on their block or in their community, which prevents our ability to attract the type of development and re-investment that we sorely need and want.**

**I have been pleased with the creation of impact zones and special tact teams to address those districts that have high incidents of crime. It behooves us all to report crimes and disorderly behavior that is taking place in the public way. At every meeting or community gathering, I reiterate the TSA motto – “if you see something, say something.” I also have placards that can be seen throughout the ward that remind criminals and potential criminals that in the 7th Ward, we call police.**

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

**I support any legislation that will get guns off our streets and stop the flow of illegal guns from the surrounding counties and states.**

**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:

Please explain:

**I am still exploring the issue of whether the school board should be elected. Appointments to boards allow people to be vetted and more closely scrutinized outside of the messiness that comes when folks run for public office. I do believe democracy has a positive impact and I’d strongly consider a hybrid model where we can combine the best of both.**

**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:

**I support TIFs as one tool to support public and private development throughout the City, especially when it comes to building and maintaining infrastructure, such as roads and projects in the public way.**

**In the 7th Ward I would like to see the boundaries of the Avalon Park/South Shore TIF extended from its current termini at 79th Street/Exchange Ave. to 71st Street/ Exchange Ave. There are potential projects that would benefit public and private development along this commercial, housing, retail and industrial corridor.**

**There are several options on how excess TIF funds could be used. There should be a system developed to analyze the best use of these funds from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. Some of the considerations that should be taken into account in making a final determination should include: the area where the funds were originally generated, needs of that community, needs of surrounding communities, and needs throughout the city.**

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

**I would like to see a system developed to analyze the best use of these funds from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective that takes into account the aforementioned considerations.**

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

**I have been in conversation with developers and property owners on how best to bring back some of our traditional neighborhood retail corridors and the 95th Street big box corridor. Most new employers in the ward, which have mainly been small businesses, have made a commitment to hire locally and to give back to the neighborhood.**

**On December 16, I hosted the first-ever E. 79th Corridor Planning meeting along with Chairman Michelle Harris. This planning initiative included roundtable discussions with experts and community stakeholders with the goal of developing a strategy of next steps that will infuse mixed-use development along this neighborhood corridor. This process will serve as a model on how we further engage stakeholders on ways to re-vitalize other neighborhood corridors in the 7th Ward.**

**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?

**It’s important that communities like mine have ample representation in the council. We fought for decades for equal representation in City Council and I don’t believe we should give up that voice so easily.**

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No:

Please explain:

**I believe working men and women, the local economy, and tourism would benefit from a casino located in Chicago. If this happens, I would also support that a percentage of proceeds to go to education and to economic development initiatives that will help some of the city’s most disadvantaged neighborhoods.**

**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:

Please explain:

**I support the administration looking at ways to make areas near schools and parks safer; however, speed cameras should not be relied upon as a long-term revenue source. These devices are about changing behavior and once that happens, there will likely be a decline in future revenues.**

**Proper notice should be given to residents when these cameras are installed, so they are aware of the consequences of their travel behavior, before they find themselves with one or more ticket(s), cannot pay the cost and fees, and are then subject to the wheel locking device. This can leave individuals who did not have the funds to pay the original ticket in precarious positions when it comes to commuting back and forth to work.**

**11) Ward issues**

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

1. **Make sure that residents of the 7th Ward continue to receive the highest quality in city services.**
2. **Continue to fight to bring much needed economic development to the ward.**
3. **Shut down businesses that are not being good corporate citizens and I will continue in my efforts to engage the residents of the community at all levels.**