**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Name**: Andrew Hamilton

**Ward**: First

**Occupation**: Attorney

**Education**: Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, University of Louisville, 2002.

Juris Doctor, Thomas M. Cooley Law School, 2007.

**Previous political and civic experience**: This is the first time running for office.

**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?**

No, as to the previous agreements. The Illinois Supreme Court’s opinion and interpretation of the Illinois State Constitution in *Kanerva v. Weems*, 2014 IL 115811 (2014), made it clear that previously-made agreements must be enforced. However, we must refrain from kicking the can down the road any longer. The right solution to the pension crisis is not to simply increase taxes or cut spending, it should be a comprehensive plan that cuts spending while broadening the tax base without the need to increase tax rates or fees.  This plan should include a grander vision for Chicago’s future.  If the residents and businesses of Chicago are doing better, many of the city’s financial problems will be alleviated.  We must look for means of boosting economic growth by modernize city government to be more enterprise-friendly and encourage education, jobs, and research.

**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?**

Simply raising property taxes will not resolve the issue of underfunded pensions. We need a more comprehensive approach in assessing and reviewing our spending in each and every department within the City of Chicago.  As it would be a mistake to believe that we can only cut our way out, proper oversight from aldermen and input from taxpayers is crucial in order to pay debts and provide services.  We need a comprehensive plan that cuts spending while broadening the tax base without the need to increase tax rates or fees. If not, then consider an alternative revenue sources.

**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?**

We must focus on the best interests of our children. We need more accountability and transparency in the day-to-day operation of our public schools.  In order for our children to have a competitive edge in this world, we need to properly fund our schools and make sure that the investments we make in schools are progressive and forward thinking.  In order to have a solvent retirement system and improve district finances, like the police and fire pension issue, we must create a comprehensive plan that cuts spending while broadening the tax base without the need to increase tax rates or fees.  We need a more comprehensive approach in assessing and reviewing our spending in each and every department. If not, then consider an alternative 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**

No.

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

Yes, assuming it is constitutional.

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

No.

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

The right solution is to broaden the tax base without the need to increase tax rates or fees.  Again, we should focus on a grander vision for Chicago’s future. We must look for means of boosting economic growth by modernize city government to be more enterprise-friendly and encourage education, jobs, and research.

**4) Crime**

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

Yes. As an alderman, I will work closely with the police and community to improve public safety. I will encourage the police to expand the number of officers walking the beat to strengthen community-police relationships.

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

I am eager to work with the General Assembly to alleviate the illegal gun presence in our streets through proposing buy-back programs, tougher penalties on “straw purchasers,” etc.

**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, I support an elected school board.  The residents of Chicago should be allowed to decide the best person fit for the position.

**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?**

If used properly, Tax Increment Financing Funds (“TIF”) can be an invaluable tool for the redevelopment of our depressed communities.  However, we need more transparency in the manner in how our tax dollars are being spent.  Taxpayers should feel confident that their money is being spent wisely and efficiently, ensuring that these programs are doing the most good possible for the communities paying for them.

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

We need to reevaluate the spending measures. Examples such as the Marriot Hotel and an arena for DePaul basketball are not necessarily congruent with the intent of TIFs as a spending method in the redevelopment of our depressed communities.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

As the First Ward is a vibrant and diverse community, we welcome the entrepreneurial spirit.  Small businesses are the backbone of not only Chicago, but our country.  As a small business owner myself, I sympathize with the everyday small businesses in Chicago.  As such, we need more incentives to keep a global-competitive edge and create more jobs.  Additionally, we need to make it easier for individuals to start and run businesses in the City.  If you have a good idea and are willing to work hard, the City should encourage that person, not stand in her way.

**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?**

Having 50 aldermen benefits our communities by providing our communities with a stronger voice. Part of being an alderman is providing hyper-local services, by decreasing the number of alderman it would reduce the ability of city government to provide those services. Additionally, it is important that every resident has a voice in the City Council. Reducing the number of aldermen will make it even more difficult for the concerns of Chicagoans to have their interests heard at City Hall.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes, with reasonable limitations. By having casinos located in Indiana, Wisconsin, and the suburbs, we are practically surrounded by them. Chicago can benefit from a casino in generating revenue and will aid in satisfying our pensions, operational expenses, and towards education spending.

**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?**

I am troubled by the program. Based on recent articles, it seems that these cameras provide little tangible safety benefit. This seems like another unnecessary burden on the residents of Chicago, just to increase city revenues. We need new ideas for attracting business and money to Chicago, not additional “nuisance” taxes like these cameras.

**11) Ward issues**

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

The top three issues in the First Ward of Chicago are public safety, lack of city services being utilized properly, and education. As alderman, I will work to improve public safety and ensure that city services will be promptly and efficiently provided. The greatest concern from constituent feedback is the lack of accountability and response times. Upon taking office, I will develop a mobile application for residents to communicate directly with the Alderman’s office to report issues such as potholes, graffiti, burned out street lights, reporting rodent problems, and more. Constituents will be able to work directly with the Alderman’s office and I will be accountable to make sure their concerns are resolved.