

## 2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: Ameya Pawar

Ward: 47

Occupation: Alderman, 47<sup>th</sup> Ward

Education:

A.M. Social Service Administration – University of Chicago (exp. 2015)

M.Sc. Threat and Response Management – University of Chicago

M.P.A. Public Administration – Illinois Institute of Technology

B.A. Religion and Philosophy – Missouri Valley College

U.S. State Department Scholar

Previous political and civic experience:

Alderman of 47<sup>th</sup> Ward

Developed Chicago's first smartphone app to report service requests- Chicago Works

Former Board Member of Common Pantry

Former Board Member of the Illinois Center for Violence Prevention - Gala Chair

Former Management Intern--Village of Riverside

Multiple conference presentations at FEMA Higher Education Conference

Co-author of textbook: Emergency Management and Social Intelligence: A Comprehensive All-Hazards Approach

### 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: YES

Please Explain:

The police and fire pension crisis is a statewide issue. Nearly every municipality in the State of Illinois and their corresponding pension funds for police and fire are facing crises of catastrophic proportions. Public safety personnel (across Illinois) have paid into a pension system – and depend on their pensions for retirement security as most do not qualify for Social Security benefits. Chicago pension systems for police and fire are quickly spiraling out of control; in order to SAVE pensions for the men and women of the Chicago Police Department and Chicago Fire Department, Chicago must work with suburban and downstate municipalities to reform the pension system (identify cost savings) for current employees and retirees AND identify revenue to increase payments into the pension systems. But, let me be clear, if there is no solution in Springfield, the

City of Chicago will have to raise property taxes, cut services, or some combination of both.

Here are specific ideas:

- The State of Illinois should enact a progressive income tax and allocate additional revenue for pension payments through the Local Government Distributive Fund. The additional funds should be allocated to dedicated accounts to be used for pension payments.
- Increase employee contributions
- Eliminate compounded COLAs for applicable pension funds and move to simple COLA increases
- Identify reforms to healthcare plans – focus on wellness for current employees and retirees

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?

The additional revenue to support the pension reform for municipal workers and laborers is currently sourced from an increase to 911 fees attached to phone lines. The increase in fees will generate an additional \$50 million in revenue for the OEMC, thereby freeing up general fund dollars for pension payments. With a balloon pension payment for police and fire pensions looming, the following revenue ideas should be adopted:

- The Illinois legislature should create a progressive income tax for Illinois residents instead of relying on a regressive flat tax structure. The additional revenues generated for Chicago through the Local Government Distributive Fund should be dedicated to pension payments.
- Every budget account and line should be scrubbed to find one-time or longer term savings to fund pension payments

Simply put, every option must be exhausted before I will vote on a property tax increase. For too long politicians have been ducking tax increases by selling off assets like the Skyway or parking meters – making one-off decisions for their own political careers. We are now at a point where the City must take action to save pension systems and protect taxpayers. This means acknowledging a reality where property tax increases are on the table along with pension reforms which reduce benefits. This is the truth. Anyone who states they will oppose a tax increase and somehow save pensions is either being dishonest or doesn't comprehend the magnitude of the problem. . We need to elect leaders who are willing to be honest about the challenges and the viable paths forward – since running for my first term, I have consistently spoken out about the need to make tough decisions to guarantee Chicago's future. I recognize the scale and size of the

pension problem. I was elected to make tough and decades-deferred decisions. For Chicago to survive and to ensure retirees can count on the pension they earned, I will take the tough votes to sustain Chicago's future.

## **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?

The State of Illinois must allocate additional funding to Chicago Public Schools. The first avenue is to enact a cost-shift of pension costs to suburban and downstate municipalities. Chicagoans currently pay for Chicago teacher pensions through property taxes. Chicagoans also pay for all other school district teacher pensions through their income taxes – suburban and downstate districts do not pay for teacher pensions through property taxes. A cost shift will level the playing field and free up additional funds for Chicago Public Schools. Second, I believe the State of Illinois should enact a progressive income tax. A progressive income tax would mean a tax cut for over 90% of Illinoisans while generating more revenue than our current flat tax structure. A progressive income tax would make additional dollars available to Chicago Public Schools and help stabilize the Board's financial condition.

## **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: Depends on which services are included.

\* 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: NO.

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

By nature, sales taxes are regressive – they do not follow an ability to pay and the expansion of the sales tax would disproportionately impact individuals and families on the lower ends of the income spectrum.

Mayor Emanuel and the City Council recently abolished the head tax. Creating an income-tax for non-residents of the City would incent job creation outside of the City. Like the former head tax, a city-only income tax for non-residents would serve as a deterrent for job creation with City limits.

A tax on financial transactions could work if we knew what problem we were attempting to solve. If the goal is to reduce high frequency trading or reduce higher risk/speculative trading, then taxing each transaction would alter trading behavior. That said, it is important to remember that levying a tax per transaction is not a panacea. That is, the ‘Lasalle Street Tax’ will not solve our pension or budget problems. In sum, a tax will not generate the \$1 billion a year some mayoral candidates and unions are touting. To work, a transactions tax must be structured to generate slightly less than the cost to move trading operations or to innovate. For example, if the cost to move trading operations to another state is \$300 million, a transactions tax must generate slightly less than that to avoid an exodus from LaSalle Street. Moreover, any transactions tax (at the local level) must be flexibly structured to account for reductions in costs to move to other cities or innovations in technology. If the goal is to levy a transactions tax (like India, Singapore, or France) and do it right, then a transactions tax must be instituted at the federal level. A tax instituted at the national level will counteract the movement of trading operations but will not halt innovation through technology. A better way to generate revenue is to institute a progressive income tax in Illinois so individuals who earn more, pay more – and pay their fair share. A progressive income tax could reduce State income taxes for more than 90% of Illinoisans, while generating more revenue than is currently generated by the State’s flat income tax structure.

#### **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 hiring additional police officers and will work with my colleagues and the Mayor to find a source for funds to increase the number of officers on the street.

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

Most of the guns recovered in Chicago are purchased via straw purchasers. It is becoming clear that the penalties for straw purchases do not deter these transactions. Here are some ideas I have:

- The State of Illinois should mandate gun liability insurance as a pre-condition for gun ownership. The risk of insurance would vary. The risk associated with a hunter or gun collector is different than someone purchasing dozens of 9mm guns per month. Requiring liability insurance would require gun owners to list purchased guns on their policy. Insurance could reduce the flow of illegal guns into Chicago via straw purchase.
- It is too easy to purchase a gun on a secondary market or at gun shows. The State of Illinois must pass tighter regulations for purchases on the secondary market.
- The State of Illinois must declare gun violence a public health issue. We now have a Surgeon General who is looking to combat gun violence through public health programs. Illinois should tap into any and all resources that may come with Surgeon General initiatives.

In February of 2013, the Chicago Tribune published my op-ed, “Insure Guns to Ensure We Save Lives.” In this piece I outline why gun liability insurance could pinch off the illegal gun supply chain and reduce gun violence in Chicago.

### **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: YES

Please explain:

I have always supported an elected school board because Chicagoans should have voice and input as to how Chicago Public Schools are run, how taxpayer dollars are spent (given over 50% every dollar collected through property taxes goes to CPS), and how school reforms are implemented. Like City Council, a school board should be representative of the people who live in the City of Chicago.

### **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?

My approach to allocating 47<sup>th</sup> Ward TIF funds is very simple --direct TIF dollars to neighborhood schools, parks, libraries, and public infrastructure. Why? By investing public dollars in schools, parks, and public infrastructure, economic development will always follow. The result: great schools, rising property values, new businesses, jobs, and a thriving community. To that end, since 2011, my office has allocated over \$44 million in 47<sup>th</sup> Ward TIF dollars for the following projects:

- Lake View High School                      \$2 million for STEM Program
- Coonley Elementary                        \$16.5 million for new addition
- McPherson Elementary                    \$400k for new outdoor campus
- Kerry Wood Cubs Field                    \$1.25 million for first IHSA baseball stadium on north side (total \$6 million project)
- Clark Park                                    \$3.5 million for soccer field, site remediation, etc.
- Clark Park Boat House                    \$1.25 million
- Welles Park                                    \$1.33 million for new playground, locker rooms, bathrooms, roof & tennis court surfacing
- Lawrence Avenue Streetscape          \$13 million the Lawrence Avenue Streetscape
- Sulzer Regional Library                    \$5 million for renovations
- Divvy stations                                \$100k
- Green Alley Construction                \$227k

I plan on using the balance of the years remaining in 47<sup>th</sup> Ward TIF districts for investments to Lake View High School, Amundsen High School, McPherson Elementary, Waters Elementary, Revere Park, Chase Park, Welles Park, and in other public institutions/infrastructure. All 47<sup>th</sup> Ward TIF districts should be retired at the end of their terms (as listed in TIF enabling legislation).

I also believe that TIFs should be scrubbed every year and the balance of those funds should be declared surplus and returned to original taxing bodies. Currently, Mayor Emanuel has issued an executive order which requires an annual surplus. I plan on introducing legislation to codify and expand the executive order – the legislation will codify language which ensures all TIF dollars not committed to projects and debt are declared surplus on annual basis.

In 2013, Ald. Michelle Smith, Ald. Pat Dowell and I passed the TIF Accountability Ordinance. This legislation requires the City to publish all the promises made by developers and private entities to the City in exchange for City incentives. The TIF Accountability Ordinance requires those promises to be published online and requires the City to verify the results of the promises. By creating a transparency and audit requirement, TIFs are less likely to be abused. Simply put, the ordinance will help ensure bad deals are never repeated, allow the City to claw-back funds when promises are not kept, and ensure honest actors can continue to access city incentive programs.

## **7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

When I took office, the City was still reeling from the impacts of the Great Recession. Hundreds of storefronts were vacant and many residents were struggling to find work. I made it a priority to work with community organizations, chambers of commerce, and residents to jump-start economic development by seeking out major projects. The first success came with securing the Lycee Francais campus on the vacant Ravenswood Hospital site (vacant since early 2000s). In 2015, Lycee Francais will open a new \$32 million campus in the heart of Ravenswood. Next, my office focused on Lawrence Avenue. My office allocated \$13 million in TIF funding for the design and implementation of the Lawrence Avenue Streetscape. The goal of the streetscape was to connect the retail feel of Lincoln Ave from Lincoln Square to Andersonville on Clark via Lawrence Avenue. Once designed, my office worked for nearly two years to secure and advance over \$50 million in economic development at Ravenswood Station. The project includes a new Mariano's, LA Fitness, and 150 units of transit-oriented housing which includes affordable housing. This project alone created over 600 jobs and millions in new property and sales taxes. Other notable economic development projects include: the Chicago Fire Soccer Center, and allocating and advancing 47<sup>th</sup> Ward TIF funds to neighborhood schools, parks, libraries, and public infrastructure. Just as important, most empty storefronts on Lincoln, Damen, Wilson, and Montrose are now filled. And for the first time in many years, businesses are seeking out Western, Irving Park and Ashland. I believe our strong partnerships with our local chambers of commerce and community organizations have accelerated our efforts to attract and retain businesses. We work together with an all-hands on deck manner – and the strategy is paying off.

In sum, in just under four years, my office has secured and advanced over a quarter of a billion dollars in economic development the 47<sup>th</sup>ward. These projects have resulted in the creation of over 1000 jobs, new property and sales tax revenue, more affordable housing, and the 47<sup>th</sup> ward is thriving.

In my second term, I plan to complete my vision neighborhood K-12 in the community. People move to my community for elementary schools, but move to the suburbs for high schools when their children reach the sixth or seventh grade (sometimes much earlier). Why? Families and students are living in a pressure-cooker. If you live in Tier 3 or 4 of the CPS Tier system, your child has to get straight A's, never miss a day of school, and test in the 95th-99th% percentile to be competitive for enrollment in a selective enrollment high school. For many families, the stress is just too much and they move to the suburbs. What do they get in the suburbs? Suburbs make schools the starting point for everything they do. Property values, economic development, and community sustainability is tied to the school districts. One tax bill nets a family an entire K-12 system. This means there is no stress about getting into the right high school to get into the right college as everyone goes to the same high school. There is more stability and equity for all kids. And this allows kids to be kids and families to live with some peace.

To combat the suburban outflow, and in response to the concerns I hear over and over again, I launched GROW47, the City's first community based effort to build a neighborhood K-12 system. The goal: give families in the City what they seek out in the suburbs -- a neighborhood K-12 system. In the next four years, my goal is to extend successes from K-8 to grades 9-12. The fact is, Lake View High School and Amundsen are great options but shaping perception is vital. My plan is to get everyone involved with our neighborhood schools --parents, homeowners, renters, and business owners to change school perception, identify additional resources for our schools, and build community around our neighborhood high schools. Simply put, replicate a proven model in the 47<sup>th</sup> Ward.

How does this create jobs and promote economic development? When schools win, everyone wins. I believe that when you invest in schools, economic development and job creation always follow. And to maintain strong property values, attract new businesses, and create jobs, my plan is to continue investing in our neighborhood schools.

## **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 have been on the record as being in favor of reducing the size of City Council. I believe we can reduce the number to 25 aldermen.

That said, the underlying issue (and the source of frustration for many Chicagoans) with all matters relating to the City Council is the lack of a healthy tension between the executive and legislative branches in City government. In December of 2013, the City Council passed legislation to create an independent budget office for City Council, the City Council Office of Financial Analysis (COFA). I was one of the lead sponsors (along



with Ald. Michele Smith and Ald. Pat Dowell) of the legislation and spent a better part of my first term pushing for this major reform. Chicago is now the fourth city in the nation to create such an office. The purpose of this office is to provide independent analyses of all proposed major public policy proposals introduced by the Mayor or Aldermen, public/private partnerships, asset leases, the annual budget, and the City's financial condition – including long-term debt, pensions, and structural deficits.

Had COFA been in place over the last decade, City Council could have relied on the COFA director to provide expert and independent opinions and advice on the City's long-term debt, the parking meter deal, budget proposals, the use of bond funds, etc. Instead, previous administrations were able to leverage the fear of cuts to services and programs to ram legislation through City Council. Simply put, the legislative branch needs to be a co-equal partner to the executive branch. And to do this, we need to move beyond voting percentages of with or against the Mayor as narrative for good government and reform. We need to ensure the City Council is driving public policy as much as the Mayor's office. And to do this, City Council must be involved with all legislative 'sausage-making.'

The COFA Oversight Committee (of which I am a member) has not yet agreed on a consensus candidate to run the COFA office. One of my priorities in 2015 is to help break the gridlock and hire COFA's first-ever director. Once a COFA director is in place, I believe the office and staff can start studying the impacts of reducing City Council and other major proposed reforms.

In sum, I remain committed to reforming City Hall in ways which ensure City Council has more oversight over the budget and financial matters. While I support the reduction of City Council, I do believe we need to address the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches. Once in place, COFA will rebalance some of the power dynamics but more importantly, ensure a healthy tension exists between the Mayor's office and City Council.

## **9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: NO.

Please explain:

I do not believe government should be in the business of gaming, especially when government is playing the house. This means government is actively betting against the people entering the casino – actively betting against its own people to meet a bottom line. This is a race to the bottom. Let also be clear. Individuals and families have a finite number of disposable dollars. If those disposable dollars go into the casino, less money will be spent on consumer or household goods. Gaming is just a shift of finite dollars -- a casino will not create new wealth or bring prosperity to households. A casino is akin to a

permanent parking meter deal where instead of making tough decisions to bring in revenue in a progressive manner, we rely on gimmicks and regressive taxation on the poor. I cannot support any proposal to bring a casino to Chicago.

It's also important to note that after decades of gaming revenue, Atlantic City is no better off than today than prior to allowing gaming. Just as important, gaming revenues are down over 40% from their peak in 2006. Chicago does not need to replicate Atlantic City's failures.

## **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:

I voted NO on the speed camera ordinance and would have voted NO on the red light camera legislation had I been a member of City Council at the time the legislation was passed.

## **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 are:

Building a neighborhood K-12 system in the community. In 2011, I launched GROW47, the City's first community effort to build a neighborhood K-12 system. The goal: give families in the City what they seek out in the suburbs -- a neighborhood K-12 system. In the next four years, my goal is to extend successes from K-8 to grades 9-12. The fact is, Lake View High School and Amundsen are great options but shaping perception is vital. My plan is to get everyone involved with our neighborhood schools --parents, homeowners, renters, and business owners to change school perception, identify additional resources for our schools, and build community around our neighborhood high schools. Why? People move to my community for elementary schools, but move to the suburbs for high schools when their children reach the sixth or seventh grade (sometimes much earlier). Families and students are living in a pressure-cooker. If you live in Tier 3 or 4 of the CPS Tier system, your child has to get straight A's, never miss a day of school, and test in the 95-99% percentile to test into a selective enrollment high school. For many families, the stress is just too much and they move to the suburbs. What do they get in the

suburbs? Suburbs make schools the starting point for everything they do. Property values, economic development, and community sustainability is tied to the school districts. One tax bill nets a family an entire K-12 system. This means there is no stress about getting into the right high school to get into the right college as everyone goes to the same high school. There is more stability and equity for all kids. And this allows kids to be kids and families to live with some peace. In the last four years, my office allocated over \$40 million in TIF funds to schools, parks, libraries, and public infrastructure. GROW47 has raised over \$400k in private funds, advocated for state grants in partnership with parent groups (which resulted in over \$2 million in grant funding), and allocated hundreds of thousands in aldermanic menu funds to neighborhood schools. The result: EVERY neighborhood school in the 47<sup>th</sup> Ward has benefited from a major capital improvement project. In the next four years, I plan to accelerate efforts at neighborhood high schools. Specific goals for the next four years include:

- Complete the vision to build a neighborhood K-12 system in our community — less stress, less testing, and more stability
- Partner with all stakeholders to identify and allocate additional resources for Lake View High Partner with all stakeholders to identify and allocate additional resources for Amundsen High School
- Partner with feeder schools to promote neighborhood high schools by working with parents, neighborhood organizations, block clubs, chambers of commerce, and businesses in our community
- Complete the McPherson Elementary outdoor campus with a \$2 million TIF allocation
- Work with Hamilton Elementary Action Team to complete outdoor campus plan
- Work with Waters Elementary, Ravenswood Elementary, and Audubon Elementary to plan for overcrowding
- **Continue advocating for an elected school board**

2. The second major issue is the restoration of the Lincoln #11 Bus. The CTA wrongfully eliminated this line in 2012. I voiced my strong opposition in the months leading up to the CTA's decision to cut the bus line. And, since the cut, I've been working with my community to continue the advocacy to restore the bus line. I will never stop fighting for restoration of the #11 bus.

3. The third major issue is City services, the City's financial stability and sustainability, and legacy issues. To be effective at the ward and citywide level, I've focused my energies in the following ways: 1. Ensure our constituent service operation is responsive and on-top of local issues. 2. Be honest about the City's legacy costs 3. Legislate on citywide issues to reform City Hall and address long-standing social justice issues. To those ends, the 47<sup>th</sup> Ward constituent services are responsive and work non-stop to resolve problems and ensure high quality City services. And from Day 1, I've been honest with my constituents about the City's finances. I am very open about discussing

the need to find additional revenue to ensure we properly fund pensions and provide more robust City services. I am also very clear about the need to restructure pensions to prevent catastrophic increases to property taxes. And finally, I've passed 10 major pieces of citywide legislation (in partnership with my colleagues and Mayor Emanuel) focused on reforming City Hall and addressing social justice issues. Samplings of those efforts include:

- Amending the Human Rights Ordinance to prevent employment discrimination by adding credit history as a protected class
- Passage one of the strongest anti-wage theft ordinances in the country
- Passage of the debt collection license, requiring debt collectors to obtain a city license
- Passage of the SRO moratorium and SRO Preservation Ordinance which preserves single room occupancy housing for our City's most vulnerable
- Passage of the Chicago Sweat Free Procurement Ordinance which ensures the City procures garments and uniforms from suppliers free of child and slave labor
- Passage of an ordinance creating an independent budget office for City Council
- Passage of the TIF Accountability Ordinance which makes TIF deals and promises transparent and requires the City to audit TIF deals and make the results of those audits public

Here are my plans for the next four years.

Locally, my plans are to:

- Continue working with community organizations, block clubs, and chambers of commerce to promote small business, recruit new businesses, and maintain the small business character of the 47<sup>th</sup> Ward
- Continue fighting for the restoration of the No.11 Bus
- Continue to promote and advance responsible development to increase affordability and deny developments which undermine quality of life
- Develop a long-term community plan to maintain independent businesses, build additional affordable housing, and link neighborhood schools with community organizations, block clubs, and chambers of commerce
- Continue to bring additional units of affordable housing into community when affordable requirements ordinance is triggered
- Work to increase green space, improve existing parks, and invest in infrastructure to reduce flooding
- Continue fighting for additional public safety resources – more officers and more patrols

On the citywide level, my plans are to:

- Work with my colleagues on the independent budget oversight office committee to hire a director
- Work with my colleagues to pass a paid sick leave ordinance, extending sick leave benefits to hundreds of thousands of Chicagoans
- Pass legislation reducing time for businesses to obtain sidewalk café permits and communities to obtain permit parking/traffic calming measures, etc.
- Pass TIF Reform legislation by codifying an annual TIF surplus policy
- Continue to oppose privatization and bring independent thinking and leadership to City Council
- Continue to oppose a Chicago based casino and video gaming
- Continue to oppose privatization of Midway Airport
- Push for a citywide economic development strategy around K-12 education revolving around neighborhood elementary and neighborhood high schools
- Advocate for pension reforms which help save pension benefits for retirees while promoting reforms to prevent catastrophic tax increases or service cuts
- Push for long term plan which moves capital improvement planning away from localized incentive programs to a citywide capital plan for greater equity and investment in all neighborhoods
- Propose plans for major infrastructure projects – e.g. high speed rail from O’Hare to Downtown
- Join advocates in Springfield to pass a progressive income tax and finding additional revenue for public education
- Work with community to push the Department of Aviation and FAA to reduce aircraft noise and traffic over north side of Chicago