

## DEMOCRACY FOR PITTSBURGH

### Gavin Robb - Candidate for City Council, District 3

City and County executive, legislative and administrative offices:

I. Privacy, openness, and accountability: What have you done in the past to support "sunlight" laws or encourage public access to information, deliberation, and decision-making? (and/or) What existing or new ideas do you support, going forward, to encourage informed public participation? How have you / how would you protect the information of private individuals, that might otherwise be inappropriately disclosed by the push for greater public openness? From first responders (police, fire, EMT) through higher level administrative positions, what practical steps do you support to encourage professionalism and accountability?

**As an attorney whose practice focuses on municipal law, I regularly handle requests for public information under the Pennsylvania Right-to-Know Law which require legal review and response. I strongly support citizens' access to public documents, particularly those dealing with expenditure of public funds, in order to ensure that public officials remain accountable to their constituents. Public access must be balanced with individual privacy, however - in particular, personal financial information, home addresses and telephone numbers, and communications and documents not related to a public official/employee's agency duties should not be subject to disclosure. Public employees at all levels should be held to high standards of character and performance, and conduct to the contrary should be addressed promptly and firmly.**

II. Several public-private partnerships have been set up in areas such as the Schenley plaza and riverside locations on the Northside. While this pseudo-public space is lovely for recreation, it is also considered private for purposes of assembly, rallies, protests, or informational / not-for-profit leafleting--effectively, off-limits, even including the adjacent city sidewalks. Moving forward, how can the city and county prevent or remedy the significant de-facto privatization of public space, without, at the same time, countenancing harassment?

**The rights of free speech and association granted to our citizens by the Constitution are extremely important and every reasonable step should be taken to ensure that those rights are protected. At the same time, we must keep in mind the rights of property owners to determine how their property will be used. For the scenarios outlined above, I would suggest working collaboratively with the property owners to determine whether some specified, limited portion of the quasi-public property might be utilized for the purposes outlined in order to achieve an appropriate balance of the two interests.**

III. What sorts of jobs best anchor and sustain a community? What role, if any, should your office play in encouraging / not hindering certain types of job development?

**There are no specific types of jobs which best anchor a community - but it is obvious that unemployment can be a major contributing factor to the degradation of a neighborhood. As Councilman, I will work with local businesses and developers to encourage economic development and investment in the various**

**neighborhoods within the District and the City. Construction and development of new retail, service and other job-creating industry would directly lead to new jobs and help us to realize the untapped potential of our communities.**

IV. What sorts of development, redevelopment, or blight-fighting programs best anchors and sustains a community? What could you do, within the bounds of your office, to suggest, encourage, implement or support specific responses to (e.g.) abandoned or decrepit housing, declining schools, and/or other problems that typify a community in decline?

**There are many tools available to the City to fight urban blight that are not being used to their fullest extent. First, I would push for increased enforcement of building code and property maintenance standards. The City of Pittsburgh is enabled by statute to raze vacant, blighted properties as long as due process is provided to the property owners. The Eminent Domain Code can be an effective tool but should be used judiciously to avoid trampling on private property rights. In addition, the recently enacted Blighted and Abandoned Conservatorship Law allows municipalities to take control of vacant properties which are subject to nuisance/code violations, in certain instances, in order to abate the conditions or demolish the structures as necessary. I would encourage full use of all tools available to the City to attack the issue of blight in our neighborhoods.**

V. The 800 lb gorillas: Health care is a statewide / national level issue. So is ecological policy. However, benefits, funding, permitting and potentially funding of clinics are city and county issues (within the bounds set by Act 47). Similarly, both the city and county have some say in determining the appropriateness and location of coal and gas extraction / processing / waste product storage, from the standpoint of risks to public health and to infrastructure. In both cases, very large local employers have vested interests that may not be in line with the best interests of the citizenry. What, realistically, do you hope to do to further the best interests of the citizenry, and/or reduce the risk of inappropriate corporate influence?

**At the risk of oversimplification, all decisions made by an elected official should be made to further the best interests of the citizenry. There are times when these interests may be aligned with large corporate employers and other instances when that will not be the case. City government must strike a balance between supporting economic development while maintaining protection of the environment - we cannot jeopardize the health and safety of our residents over the promise of increased revenue. The elected members of City government must always recognize that they are ultimately responsible to their constituents - and not big corporations. In sum, I believe that sufficient protections are in place (e.g., prohibition against corporate donations, campaign finance limits) to insulate City Council from inappropriate corporate influence.**

**/s/ Gavin Robb**