

Democracy for Pittsburgh candidate questionnaire

Chris Zurawsky response

Democratic candidate, Pittsburgh City Council, District 5

Verification Statement: I, Chris Zurawsky, have personally e-mailed this document to DFA. The answers are in their final form and have been approved by me, the candidate (for better or worse!). - CZ

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?

Many years of my professional life have been dedicated to pursuing and encouraging access to public information. I hold a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University, New York City, and I have been a newspaper reporter for the Pittsburgh Courier, the McKeesport Daily News, the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, where I covered federal court. I have also taught journalism at Pitt, Point Park and the University of Newcastle, in Australia.

On the campaign trail, at a recent Pittsburgh City Council hearing at a church in Homewood, I spoke in support of police reform legislation sponsored by councilmember Ricky Burgess. At a recent Hazelwood Initiative meeting I question Police Chief Nate Harper about those proposed reforms, and I asked Cmdr. Kathy Degler, who was also at the meeting, to provide more detailed crime statistics to the Hazelwood community.

Here's the link to a page on my website containing my brief remarks at the police reform hearing

<http://www.zurawskyforcouncil.com/media.html#video>

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?

I'm pretty familiar with the Schenley Plaza development, as I'll detail briefly below. In general, I've had a number of discussions in recent years with other 14th Ward politicians about the pros and cons of "government by foundation", most recently in relation to the tree house playground that was proposed for a site adjacent to the Environmental Charter School in Regent Square. The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy is a brilliant example of "government by foundation", as is the supposedly independent public schools watchdog group, A+ Schools. It's great that PPC is cleaning up the parks, but not so great that in exchange they have a say over who gets to use traditional public space. And then there's "accountability", a word that foundations love to throw around when it's in their interest, but who do the foundations answer to?

A couple of quick things: As a reporter at the Trib, I dug up a story about CMU appropriating a slice of Schenley Park for the siting of an air pollution monitoring station for which one of its professors had a grant. I also organized my neighbors and spoke out at a public meeting in opposition to placement of a large DPW building on the Schenley Park golf course. That plan resulted from Phipps Conservatory expanding onto city property behind its main building and forcing the existing DPW facility to find a new location.

And regarding Schenley Plaza, I tried to get one of my Pitt journalism students in 2009 to find financial and development details about the plaza, as per this email:

"Alternatively, if you want to dig in to Schenley Plaza, I'd like to know the latest on the Atria's Italian restaurant that the Parks Conservancy is planning to build in the sliver of green space across the street from Hillman Library. Also, are any plans for the plaza on hold due to the down economy. Also, what have been the most successful/well-attended events there so far (they've had a number of concerts), and what's the financial picture--how much money have they made from the kiosks, events, carousel, etc. So you'd probably have to talk to a Park Conservancy person, one or two food kiosk owners, an official with Atria, maybe somebody from Pitt, etc."

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?

Jobs that are accessible to public transportation, jobs that permit flexibility in family scheduling to accommodate both two-income families and single-parent families, jobs that have a low impact on the environment, jobs that create products or provide public services, rather than retail jobs that largely funnel money from a community but provide little, other than low-wage jobs, in return.

There are, and will continue to be, a flow of new green products into the marketplace. Gauging their suitability for a particular site and installing them to meet stringent manufacturers' requirements requires research and technical skills. Plumbers, electricians etc. benefit from a near-guaranteed stream of jobs, and those jobs can't be outsourced. We

should equip our tradespeople with those skills, and those jobs will go to Pittsburghers, not to out-of-town specialists.

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?

I believe that community input is sought far too late in most development projects. Once a project is presented to the public, it's too often a done deal. As a city councilman I would work to require developers to seek community input and approval early in their planning.

I recently learned that the Young Preservationists of Pittsburgh (I think that's their official name) are working to revive the old Carnegie Library in Hazelwood. I would encourage council to work with and other like-minded groups, on similar revitalization projects around the city.

City council should work to maintain our neighborhoods' historic character, promote citizen involvement, encourage affordable housing and encourage the re-purposing or redevelopment of warehouse and industrial sites for "new economy" purposes.

Regarding education, I would like to see the city partner with the school board and the local colleges to bring instructors, professors and/or department heads from various departments into local 8th and 9th grade homerooms, to address "the classes and skills students need to take to succeed in our program" and "tips for studying our subject." We should also continue to work with the school board on revamping, promoting, and appropriately testing the effectiveness of vocational/trade schools.

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?

I'm going to stick with the Marcellus issue here. A couple of weeks ago I hung in for all 5+ hours of county council's hearing on Marcellus drilling and was the next to the last person, before Doug Shields, to provide testimony. I am a strong support of council ban on drilling in the city, however, it's pretty clear that Pittsburgh will have a tough time defending that ordinance in court. However, as you noted, the City can regulate such things as where, geographically, and in what zoning districts, a well can be located. It can also control noise

levels; use of Pittsburgh roads and the obligation to secure a bond to maintain those roads; the obligation for the operator to repair damage to the roads; and other such land use and zoning measures, as long as those ordinances are applied generally and not solely and specifically applied to oil and gas operations. For example, the location of a well might be regulated by the same provisions that regulate industrial or heavy manufacturing uses, a genus of which well drilling and operation could be considered a species. Local ordinances typically prevent public nuisance as arising from generation of noxious fumes and gases. I believe that could be included in the City ordinance even though the Clean Air Act exists.

Here's a link to a recent candidates' forum at Winchester Thurston. The clip is limited to the portion of the evening where my opponent and I spoke. One of the questions that we fielded was about Marcellus drilling.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoDe191GFAM>

END