



AFT-MD Candidate Questionnaire for Baltimore City Races

The AFT-Maryland is a federation on local unions of the AFT within the state, including the Baltimore Teachers Union and the City Union of Baltimore—whose members work for the city—as well as state employee members of the Maryland Professional Employees Council, AFT Healthcare-Maryland, and the Maryland Classified Employee Association. Together, with the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees, AFT-Maryland has thousands of members who are citizens of Baltimore City, as well as thousands of members who work to make Baltimore City a better place for its citizens and children.

The AFT-Maryland has prepared the following questionnaire for candidates running for office in Baltimore City as a means to familiarize the candidates with issues that our members care about most. It also allows us the chance to see where the candidates stand on these issues.

AFT-Maryland locals participate fully in the endorsement process of the Metropolitan Baltimore AFL-CIO Council; the council will announce its final endorsements sometime in February 2016. However, because we are a large contingency within the Baltimore AFL-CIO, the unions of the AFT-Maryland have a heavy influence on who Labor chooses as its candidates for endorsement.

Please take the time to complete this candidate questionnaire. It may be returned to

Todd Reynolds, Political Coordinator
AFT-Maryland, AFL-CIO
5800 Metro Drive, Suite 100
Baltimore, MD 21215

Fax: 410-764-3008
Email: treynolds@aftmd.org

Please return this completed questionnaire no later than February 5th, 2016, at 5pm. If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at 410-764-3030.

2016 Candidate Questionnaire—BALTIMORE CITY RACES
AFT-Maryland

Candidate for Mayor of Baltimore

Candidate's name Sheila Dixon

Address [REDACTED]

Phone [REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

Occupation: Director of Marketing

Who is your employer? Maryland Minority Contractors Association

May we make your answers to our questionnaire public? Yes

Party affiliation (circle one):

Democrat

Republican

Independent

Other (please specify) _____

Have you received an endorsement from a labor union? If so, which ones?

N/A

Have you ever held elected office? When? Baltimore City Mayor (2007-2010)
Baltimore City Council President (1999-2007) City Council Member (1987-1999)

General

1. The AFT-Maryland is a federation of numerous employee unions, including Baltimore City teachers and paraprofessional and school-related personnel (BTU); Baltimore City employees (CUB); as well county and state employees; public health professionals; and higher education workers. Why should we support your campaign?

I am the only candidate with a track record of accomplishments as Mayor and a vision and detailed plan for Baltimore's future. The Mayor's number one job is to make Baltimore City safer for everyone. That was true in 2007 and it's even truer today. By targeting our most violent offenders, holding our police and law enforcement community to the highest standards and accountability, involving all of our agencies in a comprehensive approach to safer neighborhoods, and working with community partners, we will restore faith and confidence in Baltimore.

As Mayor, I reduced crime to a 30 year low, expanded investment in community schools, implemented a 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, banned indoor smoking, started single stream recycling, launched the Charm City Circulator, created the Sustainability Commission, supported the right for hotel workers to organize, paved more streets and took on big banks that were peddling subprime loans.

Looking forward, we will make historic investment in our City's human capital. We will triple workforce funding to serve residents with and without high school degrees, providing grants on a competitive basis to workforce providers that have a proven track record of connecting underemployed adults, youth and ex-offenders with the skills they need to get good-paying jobs. We will increase the minimum wage to \$15 for all city workers putting more money in the pockets of our working families and the local businesses those families in turn support. We will prepare our children for the workforce, equipping them with the skills to start strong.

Getting a good-paying job starts with getting a good education. We will invest as far upstream as possible, strengthening early childhood education, computer science training, and our curriculum in STEM fields – Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. As a former teacher, I have a particularly personal understanding of the challenges of education in our city. Since 1996, the role of the Mayor in the direction of City Schools has been diminished. I believe that it is time to assert a greater influence over this critical aspect of social policy. The voices of our parents, teachers and students have struggled to be heard. As Mayor, I will join the School Board in seeking out those perspectives. This advocacy will result in improved training and support for teachers and other staff, active engagement of families, and expanded and enrichment opportunities to cultivate student success.

2. Have you ever been a member of a union? If yes, please give the union name, local number, and date.

From 1976 to 1986, I was a member of the teacher's union when I taught in Baltimore City Public Schools.

Worker Rights

3. Should Baltimore City librarians be granted the right to engage in collective bargaining? Should employees of the Baltimore Convention Center? If you are elected to office, will you work to expand collective bargaining rights to public employees who currently do not have that right?

As Mayor, I expanded the rights of workers at the Convention Center to organize. More than 90 of the 130 Convention Center employees are affiliated with the city union.

As City Council President and then Mayor, I have actively supported better wages for city employees and contractors. I was on the city council in 1994 when the city became the first major city in the nation to pass a living wage law on behalf of city contractors. I conditioned my support of the Hilton Hotel on the utilization of union contractors and the expectations that Hilton employees would bargain collectively.

As Mayor I expanded collective bargaining rights. Before doing so I engaged my leadership team and external stakeholders in an open dialogue. I would follow that practice again.

4. Many cities nationwide have passed ordinances that raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour. Would you be in favor of Baltimore raising its minimum wage to \$15 per hour? Why or why not?

I applaud the people and elected officials of San Francisco and Seattle for their vision and bold action to increase the minimum wage to \$15.00. But at the same time, the fundamentals of Baltimore's economy and our place in the region are very different from those two prosperous cities. I share the goal of a higher minimum wage. As a first step, I would want to learn everything we can about the proposal and engage all sectors of our community, including unions, businesses, institutions, and faith leaders in the conversation.

But we can lead as a city. I am proposing to increase the salaries of all full-time Baltimore City workers to \$15 per hour, which will lift wages of more than 2,300 mostly Baltimore City residents. I believe that the demonstrated benefits of city employees earning more to care for their families will help shape the discussion citywide.

5. Retirement for city workers: defined benefit versus defined contribution. The city of Baltimore has been discussing moving from a defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan (401K) for its employees' retirement. Do you support such a plan? Why or why not?

While the legislative changes in 2013 created a hybrid pension plan, I will agree to reconvene stakeholders to evaluate the impact of the changes on city workers and services. Baltimore faces serious fiscal challenges, and nobody benefits if we are unable to eliminate the structural deficit that threatens our ability to fight crime, connect our residents to jobs, and educate our children. I believe that issues like this are best examined and addressed by being fully transparent with the budget and engaging all stakeholders in the conversation.

The Role of Public Education in Baltimore City

6. What do you think are some of the biggest problems facing Baltimore City public schools today? If elected, how would you help solve these problems?

Many schools with strong leaders, great teachers, and active parents are outperforming statewide proficiency rates. While acknowledging and addressing our biggest challenges, we should celebrate and learn from our successes. We need to build in opportunities for school leaders and staff to learn from those examples and provide resources to replicate what works.

Like urban school districts across the country, Baltimore is challenged with the stubborn reality of a socioeconomic achievement gap within our student population. In too many cases, educators are called upon to be teachers and social workers. One way we have begun to address this gap is implementing the community schools strategy. In community schools, partners, educators and parents work together to address barriers to learning, and promote resilience and success in our students and neighborhoods. As City Council President and Mayor, I was a national leader of this movement and I am ready to not only support but improve then promote the next generation of community school investment, including expanded school-based health, after school, arts, science and technology programs.

As Mayor, I would be the chief advocate for our children and the quality of their education in Baltimore City. I would advocate for the level of funding – federal, state and local – that we know is necessary to provide high quality leadership, instruction and the facilities and resources to match. We have missed opportunities for grant and new-stream funding – the Mayor's leadership can make this happen.

Supporting and retaining high performing principals and teachers will be critical to elevating our system to one that serves our children well. We must dramatically reduce the turnover rate and constantly improve the knowledge and skills of our educators in a rapid changing environment. We must understand all of the factors that drive excellent teachers to other jurisdictions and professions and invest what it takes to attract, support, and retain them. This again entails heightened engagement and raising the voices of staff to a higher level of input.

Ultimately, all schools must be 21st Century schools enabling us to operate year round with current technology and flexible, state of the art facilities that act as the heart and hub of our communities. As we are rolling out the 21st Century facilities program, we can improve parent, student and teacher engagement in the planning. In the meantime, we cannot allow a generation of children to miss out because their schools are not yet rebuilt or renovated. By finding institutional, faith and business partners, we can improve the basic conditions, curricular materials, technology equipment for all students - now.

Recognizing that economic and workforce development strategies focused on breaking the cycle of poverty for Baltimore families are a critical ingredient in supporting of the educational attainment of Baltimore's children, my administration will employ much greater coordination of resources for employment development, juvenile justice reform, social services, health and education, managed by a more active and efficient Sub-Cabinet for Children and Families, and better informed and overseen by Citizen Advisory Boards.

7. Community Schools: Beginning in August 2015, Baltimore City will have 51 of its public schools serving as a designated community school. A community school is a public school that partners with some entity (UM-Baltimore or the Baltimore YMCA, just to name a few examples) to provide either after-school academic or social services to both students and members of the community. Would you be in favor of expanding the Community School Strategy in Baltimore by working to make more Baltimore City public schools community schools? If so, why? If not, why not?

I have always been a supporter of community schools and as Mayor, I expanded funding for Community Schools through the Family League. Baltimore's Community School program recently received national recognition for demonstrated results increasing attendance, reducing chronic absenteeism, and promoting student achievement.

It's time for us to take the next step, again leading the nation. Many more schools are utilizing coordinating strategies to address the needs of children and families and many are doing a great job of engaging partners and families, as well. We can improve community schools in a number of ways and I plan to lead in that development. Again, I will instruct the Sub-Cabinet for Children and Families to ensure that community schools become effective vehicles for the coordination and delivery of city resources.

I believe that ultimately all schools must be 21st Century community schools, enabling us to operate year round with current technology and flexible, state of art facilities that act as the heart and hub of our communities. Schools that connect not only students, but families as well, to both basic services and expanded self-development opportunities are more likely to achieve the engagement of parents and guardians, and remove barriers to success, that result in higher educational attainment for our children.

8. Public Charter Schools: There are just over 40 charter schools in the state of Maryland, and the vast majority of them reside in Baltimore City. The large, out-of-state charter operators would like to weaken state law to make teachers and staff employees of the charter board, rather than employees of Baltimore City Public Schools. This would remove all protections that teachers and staff have under the collective bargaining agreement between the teachers union and the school board. This would also limit oversight of these privately run public schools by taking them out from under the purview of BCPS, as well as giving these charters a "blank check waiver" from any local school board policy. Should charter school teachers and staff be considered employees of the charter school or of the local school board? Should oversight of these schools be weakened?

I am reminded that Albert Shanker, the President of the Federation of Teachers, embraced the charter schools concept in 1988 - as laboratories for innovation and reform. With our children in mind, I share that original vision and believe that the current charter school law is working, having expanded options for students, parents and teachers and produced highly effective schools. I invite charter school teachers and unions to identify and share the innovations and reforms that are closing the achievement gap.

If charter schools are exempt from all of the requirements of basic worker protections, achievement standards, and fairness and equality of all students despite ability, they cannot serve as the laboratories for innovations that can be replicated in other charters and in traditional schools. Therefore, I do not support major changes to existing charter law.

- a. Teachers should remain under the protection of the collective bargaining agreement, which charter school teachers support.
- b. Local school systems, which are most accountable to students, parents, teachers, should remain the authorizers of charter schools.
- c. The District's oversight is working. I support allowing charter school application to request specific waivers based on the school program, but no "blank checks." Highly effective and improving schools are rewarded with three or five year renewal; those that fall short of what must be uncompromisingly high expectations for our children are closed. The oversight policy is reviewed periodically and recommendations are made to the School Board for improvement.

As Mayor, I will play a larger role in leading innovation, often sparked by excellent charter schools, and bringing those advances forward to benefit all of Baltimore's children.

9. Charter School funding. There has been a long-running dispute between certain charter school operators and Baltimore Public Schools over appropriate funding. As a feature of being a public charter school in Baltimore, the charters are largely given cash—calculated on a per pupil basis—from the district in lieu of the services that the central administration provides neighborhood schools. Most recently, the system presented a per pupil funding formula that mandated funds intended for students living in poverty or who are English language learners actually receive those funds. Some charter operators have countered with a lawsuit, arguing that those special funds for high-poverty students or ESOL be distributed to every student equally, regardless of need. How do you think BCPS should calculate its charter school per pupil funding model?

I do not support changes to the current formula for charter schools. Funding should be fair for all students and, through Fair Student Funding, that means that money follows the child. If a Charter School has no ESOL students then they should not get ESOL funds. If a charter school has a 50% population of ESOL students then they should receive the equal portion of funds for ESOL students throughout the system. The same calculations should be used in other subgroups.

The 98% rule was set by the courts almost a decade ago. Now that City Schools has collected much more information about the central costs for all students, the funding formula should be revised to make it fair for all students.

10. School vouchers: should government give out vouchers (either a tax credit, or even a tax rebate) to parents who want to send their children to a private school? Please explain your answer.

I do not support vouchers for parents who choose to send their children to private schools. Simply, there is not enough money to adequately fund the Baltimore public schools system now. Vouchers will reduce funding for public and charter schools without a corresponding reduction in expenses, leaving the system with less funds as costs increase, providing support to private schools and leaving diminished resources for charter and traditional schools.

It is also a false benefit to Baltimore's children: the vouchers are insufficient to cover most private school tuition and most of those schools have the resources to provide scholarship funding for the students they want to attract. Moreover, public accountability does not follow vouchers. The City and State have no authority to guarantee fairness in employment of private school staff, fairness for students with special needs, civil rights protections for minority students, nor services to address inequities. Vouchers fundamentally undermine public education by depleting budgets, and invest public dollars in private, educational institutions that serve the affluent.

11. Education funding: This past year, lawmakers in Annapolis severely cut education to Baltimore City schools. Some in Annapolis have argued that the city should be contributing more to public schools, as property values (especially in and around the Inner Harbor area) have rapidly increased. Do you agree with this assessment?

First, it is imperative that the State fix the wealth-based formula that penalizes Baltimore City for entering into need-based public private partnerships to attract investment, retain and create jobs, and revitalize neighborhoods. These partnerships artificially inflate the city's wealth, measured by its tax base, without providing a corresponding increase in revenue. It is a good thing that Baltimore's wealth, as a measure by its assessable tax base, is now expanding. We have reversed population loss and successfully transformed and diversified our economy. But much of that growth was fueled by targeted tax incentives that create wealth on paper but do not generate more revenue. It is patently unfair for these paper increases, projected to come due in the future, to serve as the basis for current spending formulas. We cannot shortchange our children based on the unanticipated consequences of making investment in our future. Legislators should revisit the formula to correct this flaw. In the meantime, the State should rectify the situation with an exception to the calculations, as they have made for other jurisdictions.

12. Some current members of the Baltimore City Council have proposed a city charter amendment that would guarantee 3% of the city's budget for youth programs in the city, like recreation programs, youth mentorship, and afterschool programs. Would you be in favor of such a charter amendment? Why or why not?

I believe that this amendment is not completely well-formed as a response to the crisis of youth in contemporary urban environments and should be further discussed and re-drafted to reflect a more comprehensive approach to funding youth opportunity. A significant proportion of the City's budget should be invested in programs and services that benefit children and youth and promote their success every year. I agree with that priority and a constitutional mandate to ensure it survives political changes. However, those investments are not only those private programs targeted in the current proposed amendment – they include millions in City services, investment in schools, as well as grants to programs run by our non-profit, community-based partners. My administration will aim to inventory, evaluate, then increase and coordinate all of the best investments – and improve the ones that are not performing. Communities should become more engaged in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs aimed at their children. Coordination with educational programs provided by the District is also critical.

I do agree that all of these investments should increase as a proportion of the City's budget. However, as a citizen I have a number of questions about the effectiveness of program and service providers – public and private – and as Mayor, I will ensure that we invest in the highest-performing programs, with community input and leadership, and that allocate resources in a coordinated manner for the greatest possible impact on children's lives.

13. Due to the limited number of certified nurses in Baltimore City Public Schools, administrators and/or staff are forced to administer medication to students, share nurses between multiple school locations, and utilize part-time nurses. How would you help solve this issue?

Discussions about health in city schools should go far deeper than the nursing shortage and administering of medication. We should be pursuing the resources to provide medical services to students in schools, including mental health services. Health and mental health affect attendance and academic achievement. Students living in poverty are far less likely to receive the medical and mental health services they need unless those services are provided through the school system. For many community schools, health care may be the primary service a community school can fulfill for not just students but the whole family.

New thinking is needed to update our current – and most would say outdated -- model of one nurse making the rounds at multiple schools, largely to complete paperwork and administer medications.

Numerous schools around the country are housing fully qualified federal-funded health centers that serve children during the day and many that serve families after school hours. With some privately funded examples here in Baltimore, and university-assisted examples in many other cities, school-based health centers offer a "wrap-around, fully-integrated model of health and education."

These kinds of programs allows students, regardless of insurance coverage, access to a full-time clinic for health care and other wellness services. The thinking, for the initiative, is that parents don't miss work, avoid using emergency room services unnecessarily, and can access prevention and well child care – keeping kids who suffer from chronic conditions, in particular, from missing school and falling behind in classes. Universally available mental health supports address the chronic trauma with which the majority of our children are exposed, and ensures that new barriers to learning and positive climate do not arise.

14. Currently, all seats on the Baltimore City School Board are appointed. Legislation is introduced almost every year to allow for at least a partially elected school board. Would you be in favor of such legislation?

Yes, I support a partially elected school board. Also, I would preserve the current vetting process that includes an interview with and recommendation by a Mayoral appointed community group that includes a large contingent of union representatives.

15. Violence in the city schools. What do you think is the best strategy to assure that our school buildings are safe and welcoming environments for children, teachers, and other education professionals in Baltimore City?

The physical building and surroundings set the tone and presence of a school. If the building and grounds are unkempt and unwelcoming it sends a message of neglect and a lack of caring to students and the community. I am committed to continuing the schools facilities investments bringing 21st century schools to all of our communities, as well as making whatever improvements we can at schools that are not yet on the list for rebuilding or replacement. I am also committed to the advocacy and partnership needed to fill those schools with the talented leadership, instructors and other service providers our children and their families deserve.

The school staff, district administration and families, and community partners are the keys to making the environment safe and welcoming inside of our schools, but they cannot do this alone. The entire school system and community must join forces in making every school safe and welcoming, committing together to create caring, supportive school environments where civility is expected and respect for individuals demanded – of adults and children alike. School police and metal detectors will not solve the problem as effectively as working together with communities to heal the stress and conflict that generate the vast majority of climate disruptions and violence in schools. As Mayor, I will be visible in the schools and in the community to bring this about.

Research now has established concretely that traumatic stress is chronic in urban schools, created both by childhood specific trauma, community violence, and the daily stressors of poverty and racial discrimination and by practices of schools themselves. Also well-known is that the sources of resilience, strength, pride and support are found in those communities and school-based relationships as well. Positive, supportive relationships and effective conflict-resolution practices are the keys to creating positive school environments and improving community well-being.

As Mayor, I will lead a community-wide exploration of these sources of stress and sources of resilience – and invest in approaches that prove effective in reducing barriers and increasing opportunity.

1. Safe schools require better-trained personnel to work with students in restorative, supportive ways – employing and teaching both self-control/mindfulness and conflict mediation/resolution, along with faith-based and community partners.
2. Mentors (formal and informal) for all students from grade 6 through graduation are essential. The Mayor's office will partner with City Schools and nonprofit organizations to recruit, train, and sustain mentors for our students.
3. Student voices need to be heard and valued in each school and throughout the City. As Mayor, I will hold regular forums to hear, understand, and generate action on youth concerns.
4. We must establish effective alternative programs for students who require and need more support to attain an excellent and appropriate education.
5. Parents must be welcomed and supported to become leaders in our schools. They, as well as staff, should be able to access support and training, and should gain shared authority to create change in school practices, as they develop leadership skills.
6. Perpetually unsafe schools should be re-constituted under new management and staffing, with community partners and proven leaders putting in place new practices.

Vision for Baltimore City

16. The city has begun shutting the water off for accounts that are delinquent by more than \$250. It has started to turn off the water for both individual accounts and business accounts. Do you agree with this plan? Why or why not?

The policies and practices of the Baltimore City Water Utilities - water, sewer and stormwater - must be reviewed, updated and managed consistently to ensure a balance between responsible collection of public utility revenues and the protection of our most vulnerable citizens from the financial hardship of escalating utility rates, loss of an essential service, and payment delinquencies that can result in tax sale foreclosure and loss of their homes.

17. Privatization. Many rumors have been circulating that the city has been looking into privatizing water services. When, if ever, do you feel it is appropriate to privatize public services or to sell off or privatize city-owned resources?

Privatization of any city service or utility is always a business decision that must be carefully analyzed and evaluated. There are many examples, across the country, offering good, bad and mixed results following privatization.

Baltimore has a long and proud history of delivering high quality water service. Delivering clean and good tasting water is a business, and it's also a public service essential to quality of life, safety and health. Baltimore has done this well for the City and the surrounding counties for many, many decades.

I think our most important job is to sustain the high quality and safety of our water treatment and to continue improving the business of how we deliver service. A public utility is accountable to the public in all ways AND must be committed to delivering essential service to all citizens – how we do both well will be the mark of our success.

Our goals should be:

- To guarantee full transparency in all aspects of our three utilities - drinking water, sewer and stormwater systems, and service management
- To fully realize the customer service benefits of the investments being made in smart meters and the billing system
- To consider a more inclusive regional approach to governance of the utility which could include an advisory board of the Public Works Directors from our customer jurisdictions and transparency that would give the surrounding jurisdictions greater confidence in our management of the operations and assets
- To advocate aggressively at the state and federal level for the investment needed to improve the utility infrastructure that more than 1.8 million Marylanders rely upon for their health and safety

18. There are at least two competing strategies to help the city raise funds for recreation centers: one calls on the city to sell off a number of public parking garages downtown; another calls for the Downtown Hilton to be sold. Do you prefer one plan over the other? Or a different plan to raise revenues for more rec centers? Do you think raising more funds for recreation centers should be a priority for city leaders? Why or why not?

As long as the value of the hotel is less than the outstanding bonds, I would not advocate selling the Hilton; to do so would require the city to pay out of pocket to complete the transaction. As the hotel's performance improves, we should reconsider whether selling the hotel is in the best interest of taxpayers, Convention Center, and the hospitality and tourism industry.

Rather than selling city assets, which is an expensive source of capital, to re-build recreation centers, we should focus on the opportunities that exist to incorporate recreational programming, community libraries, and community centers into the 23 to 28 schools being built or renovated under the 21st Century Schools Initiative. New schools like Waverly, built by the District, and The Henderson-Hopkins School in East Baltimore serve as models - facilities that include a gymnasium, auditorium, library, field and playground all designed to be open and shared with the community. Our school facilities should be community/youth spaces teeming with activity after school, weekends and over the summer.

In the process of coordinating and increasing resources for young people, we should devise systematic ways to regionalize services and facilities so that all children have access to these resources. Too often the development of facilities and programs is opportunistic, political, driven by private entities and not systematically responsive to citywide community needs. My administration will study the distribution of facilities and programs for children and families and make a sensible plan for development, putting services where the needs are not being met. As part of a coordinated strategy that prevents community violence, juvenile delinquency, and promotes school success – recreation centers should be a significant part of this plan. We can create a healthy system of centers that serve all of Baltimore's children – some administered by the City, some by community partners, some by schools. Investment – whether private, City, state or federal – must follow need and be accountable to the citizens, no matter who administers each particular program or facility.

19. The City is entertaining proposals to build a trash incinerator near Curtis Bay, located less than one mile away from Benjamin Franklin High School and Curtis Bay Elementary school. Supporters claim this incinerator will create much-needed jobs for the community. Opponents argue that incinerators pollute even more than coal-burning power plants, and should not be constructed so close to public schools. What is your position on the construction of a trash incinerator in Curtis Bay?

As Mayor, hearing community concerns and giving voice to those concerns is part of the job. And a responsible decision by the City must take into account the environmental health and justice issues surrounding a project of this nature.

But the business case itself should be examined closely. When I was privy to the details of this proposed facility, it was my understanding that the business plan called for Baltimore City as a waste source BUT Baltimore already has a mutually beneficial contract with Wheelabrator and would have no reason or benefit to divert waste to a new facility. Instead, I believe most of the waste would be coming from outside of the city and if so, why should this facility be located within Baltimore City and within a residential community? The fundamental question is do WE (Baltimore City) need another incinerator? Then we could consider where with all efforts made to avoid impacting the health and well-being of citizens in already vulnerable residential communities.

Again, without being privy to the current proposal I would question whether the company has proven that it has enough buyers for the power or sellers of the necessary annual 4,000 tons of waste needed for fuel. As well as provide full transparency – permit details, sharing all studies and information comparing their plant proposal and the current standards set by our pollution control laws, etc. Any company posing potential health risks and unwilling to endure this kind of scrutiny is not the right partner for our City.

I applaud the students of Benjamin Franklin who have exhibited constructive and thoughtful approaches to educating the public about decisions that affect their health. As Mayor, I will commit to hearing their voices directly.

20. According to some statistics, there are approximately 16,000 vacant buildings and 14,000 vacant lots in Baltimore. Combined they total 30,000 vacant properties within the city limits, and play a large role in contributing to crime and other problems facing the city. More than 75% of all vacant property in Baltimore city is privately owned. How can we fix this problem and make sure land is being used effectively and efficiently in Baltimore?

Abandoned properties cost all of us money – depleting the property values of innocent homeowners, absorbing an unfair share of City taxpayer funded services, and reducing safety and quality of life in affected neighborhoods. According to a study by Temple University of vacant properties in Philadelphia, abandoned housing on a block can reduce the value of all other properties by an average of \$6,720. Among other things, the reduced value prevents other homeowners from building wealth. More directly, a city's failure to collect even a small percent of delinquent property taxes due to abandonment can result in billions of lost revenues.

The city's Vacant to Values program has made it possible for developers to assemble vacant public and private property for development in neighborhoods with underlying market strength, but the program is not structured to change the physical landscape in our poorest and most disinvested neighborhoods and cannot substitute for a neighborhood revitalization strategy.

We will work important stakeholders such as the City Comptroller and, more recently, the Maryland Stadium Authority to construct a Land Bank that speeds up the process of converting abandoned properties to productive use, better maintains properties, accelerates demolition, raises outside money, and promotes affordable housing and expands green space.