

Our Revolution Baltimore City/County

Baltimore City Endorsement Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Bill Henry

Office and District Running For: Baltimore City Comptroller

1. What is your vision and plan for public safety and reform of the police and criminal justice system?

Not applicable to the Comptroller's office.

2. What can you do, within the powers of the office you are running for, to improve education for all Baltimoreans and provide educational equity?

Not applicable to the Comptroller's office.

3. How will you address blight and revitalize communities while avoiding gentrification?

As Comptroller, I would establish a comprehensive strategy for the City's Department of Real Estate. Baltimore City lacks a comprehensive approach to the basic set of real estate problems we face as a post-industrial City — problems like hyper-vacancy, dilapidation, and lead paint. Programs like Vacants-to-Value and Project CORE have had limited success. As Comptroller, I will reorient the Department of Real Estate to work more collaboratively with all stakeholders to establish a comprehensive real estate strategy that promotes fair development, ends blight, and grows the tax base.

4. How will you ensure that communities in the Black Butterfly receive equitable investment?

While various city agencies provide review of development or tax deals at the time they are proposed, there have never been regular reviews of development mechanisms or programs, including TIF financing and Vacants to Value. I believe that doing so will help support City Council-led efforts to use an equity framework in providing development incentives going forward.

5. How would you improve transit, transportation, and the ability for people to get around in the city? Would you support the creation of a Regional Transit Authority to provide transit independence from the state?

We need to better connect what we have and then expand our system. We also need land use policy that will work with transit investment to ensure more people can easily access jobs, medical care, school, and other destinations conveniently. Let's not forget that Baltimore ranks worst in the US for emissions-related mortality, and poor air quality puts us all at risk. Also, nearly 95% of all of Baltimore is non-compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

We need to make it easier for pedestrian and bike infrastructure contracts to get to the Board of Estimates. For example, the crosswalk/sidewalk planning & construction process for a major intersection in my district won't be complete for another three years, largely because of unnecessary red tape from idea to implementation. I'll work to streamline the contracts process so communities can get the infrastructure projects they have been asking for quicker. And yes, I would support a regional transit authority.

6. How will you address the environment, climate justice, and the climate crisis locally, including not only reducing/eliminating greenhouse gas emissions within the city but also protecting the people and infrastructure from the consequences of the climate crisis? Will you declare a state of climate emergency?

Every infrastructure project must be planned with good environmental practices in mind. We are in a Consent Decree because we avoided the necessary upkeep for decades. Any new development should do three things: prioritize decreasing the amount of impervious surfaces, incentivize the reuse of materials, and support green infrastructure.

DPW should work to educate residents on recycling and composting, while also looking to create reuse/recycle programs for larger household goods. Other cities have already begun working towards Zero Waste - and it's time Baltimore does as well. In 2015, Austin, TX audited its waste and found that nearly 80% could be composted. Baltimore City has supposedly had a composting plan for over 10 years - yet each oversight hearing has yielded the same answers from Public Works; not now, not yet. Zero waste is a budgetary necessity. We are paying higher premiums for rubbish disposal each year and will soon have to look at expanding our landfill at Quarantine Road. I would rather support the creation of a Materials Recovery Facility to process our recycling.

I would also support free recycling bins and composting bins for all city residents, along with intensive community education. I would also support mandating reuse standards in all Board of Estimates contracts - new buildings don't need to be made of all new material.

And, while I'm not taking credit for it, I'm comfortable thinking of the City's existing Sustainability Plan as "my plan" when it comes to specifying actions which I agree should be taken by the City to address harmful air pollution and improve public health in Baltimore. Some we have begun to make progress on, such as the heightened pollution controls which will now be required for the Wheelabrator incinerator. Other needed actions are more challenging, such as enacting and enforcing strong anti-idling regulations for commercial cars, buses, and trucks; enacting presents political challenges and enforcement presents logistical ones. Another needed action - increase inspections, enforcement, and hazard remediation in rental properties related to mold, pests, furnace maintenance and venting, and other hazards, without passing on costs to vulnerable tenants - was just recently touched on an informational hearing I asked for from the Council's Housing & Urban Affairs committee. As Comptroller, I would be in a position to encourage agencies to adopt many of these actions in the negotiation of City contracts and purchasing. For example, the Comptroller would be well placed to encourage the implementation of an Indoor Air Quality management program. Such a program would centrally monitor issues, log complaints, and address problems, all while ensuring that the safest products are purchased when procuring paints, building materials, carpets, and cleaning supplies.

7. How will you improve public health within the city? Please address racial and economic health disparities and social determinants of health. Some things to consider:

- a. The high asthma rate;**
- b. Food insecurity and food deserts;**
- c. Disparities in life expectancy;**
- d. The effects of trauma and violence.**
- e. Lead in water and housing.**

Not applicable to the Comptroller's office.

8. How will you improve economic opportunities for all residents of Baltimore? What programs would you create or reform to improve access to well paying jobs?

I plan to launch a study of City payroll and employment records to find racial and gender disparities in pay, hiring, or promotion. I'll also ask Baltimore's private sector businesses to do the same as a key internal control for any organization to adopt, and a major part of building a more fair economy in Baltimore.

As comptroller, I would audit city contracts and procurement practices for economic inclusion. Each year, while Baltimore has a strong MBE/WBE program, we still fail to meet our targets. I plan to annually audit City contracting and other spending for economic inclusion to identify where we are falling short, and recommend strategies to the Mayor & City Council each year on how to improve our procurement policy to make sure we are utilizing or minority and women business contactors as much as possible.

In addition, our Sanitary Sewer Consent Decree requires that we invest in a sustainable workforce. We should look to grow our Small Business Development Program in the Department of Public works to continue to address the requirements of the Clean Water Act.

9. What reforms to the structure and functioning of city government would you implement?

Transparency is key to accountability. As comptroller, I would work to make my office as open and accessible as possible. This begins with using technology and open data practices to remove the veil of secrecy from the Board of Estimates so that everyone has access to all of the available information. Both Philadelphia and New York City have audit dashboards which we should replicate, allowing anyone who is interested to check in on the financial and operational performance of agencies. In addition, I would work closely with the Inspector General, sharing our resources in a joint effort to root out corruption and waste.

10. How will you improve the quality of life for city residents? Some things to consider:

- a. Community art;**
- b. Community centers and recreation;**
- c. Illegal dumping;**
- d. Beautification of streets and neighborhoods;**
- e. Improving infrastructure;**
- f. Trash pickup and recycling.**

I believe that if people knew what we were spending money on, we would spend it better. By taking the existing budgeting, contracting and procurement processes that are deliberately insulated from public participation and opening them up to involve all of us, we can better shape those outcomes to our needs. I have long been a believer in community empowerment. The best way to provide what communities need is to involve them in the process.

11. How will you address the needs of immigrants, both documented and undocumented? Will you ensure the safety of our undocumented neighbors?

Not applicable to the Comptroller's office.

12. How will you address the need for equitable and affordable housing?

I would support a land bank. A municipal land bank is a clear solution that is long overdue to fight gentrification while working to repopulate the city. The Comptroller's Office has been a barrier to the creation of a land bank in the past, but I will support and help to implement this idea. If we remove the hurdles to build and re-develop land, we can make it easier for equitable and affordable housing to be built

13. How will you balance providing services, including water, to all citizens while planning and paying for infrastructure upgrades/repair and replacement?

The Department of Public Works' past actions have shown a need for increased transparency and scrutiny into their priorities and spendings. From withholding studies on water billing, to questionable contracting practices around sewer repairs, to finding 5.6 million dollars which had been sitting untouched for a decade, they've clearly demonstrated a substantial need for more oversight into their operations. As your Comptroller, I would only vote for projects that have proven to be equitable and managed properly. We need to make sure we are creating effective, sustainable infrastructure that will protect our environment while also serving the needs of residents. I would support additional funding, transparency, and acceleration of infrastructure improvements while also mandating DPW improve the quality of their customer service.

14. Is there anything else you'd like us to know?

I strongly believe that Baltimore City has been prioritizing the wrong things in its budget over the years. Since the 1990's, we have continuously increased the Baltimore Police Department's budget, without providing the same increased level of funding for more basic human capital reinvestment, such as Recreation & Parks, employment development, libraries, and after-school programming. We need to invest more in our residents and our communities, most specifically and importantly in the infrastructure of youth development. As Frederick Douglass said, it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.

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