

NETWORK 49 MAYORAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate Name: Ald. Roderick T. Sawyer

1) Professional Background

1. What progressive policy issue/achievement are you most proud of?

I have quite a few to name, but the Police Reform and Accountability ordinance I passed after a seven-year fight is the one I would name first. I welcomed Mayor Lightfoot when she was first elected because she campaigned on the issue of police reform, but she had a very different outlook when it came to real reform with civilian oversight.

I worked for years with community groups across Chicago, we studied policy in other cities across the country and around the world, and when we finally had a sweeping, nation-leading reform package, she stood in the way and tried to block it with her own watered-down proposal that lacked civilian oversight or any real accountability.

When voters cast their ballots in this election, they will not just vote for alders and a mayor, they will vote for members of 22 newly created Police Oversight districts. That is the result of my hard work and legislative accomplishment.

2. What have you worked on/toward that you regret NOT having accomplished?

Many. But under Mayors Emanuel and Lightfoot many good policy ideas were quashed. I proposed an ordinance years ago that would have developed new, non-regressive revenue sources and phased out most of the red light and speed cameras that are especially burdensome to our marginalized communities. But as Mayor, I will revisit this issue from the 5th Floor.

2) Climate Change / Sustainability

1. How will you fight and address the impacts of climate change? How do you plan to move Chicago towards a greener city?

In a city like Chicago, environmental issues almost always are issues of equity.

The vast majority of pollutants - toxic emissions, poisonous runoffs and waste - are in lower income communities. These have demonstrable negative impacts on health, such as higher asthma rates and are due to a combination of historical redlining, zoning, lax enforcement and continual disinvestment.

This is among the issues causing our population to decline, especially our Black population.

First of all, I would re-establish a full Department of Environment and have a wide-ranging report done on issues of environmental justice to be addressed immediately.

I would invest in and empower that department to aggressively tackle issues with immediate action against polluters. I'd offer an initial remediation plan to these companies with a deadline, and then begin to levy increasing fines for non-compliance. Whatever economic benefit they are bringing to Chicago can't be worth the damage they are causing to individual health and eroding communities.

I also want to address affordable housing and homelessness with prefab / tiny homes that would be sustainable and environmentally friendly.

2. What policies and practices will you initiate to promote environmental justice and reverse environmental racism which has steered hazardous industrial sites to be located in low-income communities?

Well, as mentioned above, I would immediately address pollution issues and the hazardous industries in these communities.

In addition to the initial remediation plan and notification of coming fines and other penalties, I would empower my new Department of Environment and all the relevant city agencies to enforce the laws we have on pollution and suggest new ones to address modern pollutants and health risks that have yet to be codified.

Then I'd have cabinet-level advisors work on dismantling the systemic causes and ensuring polluters are being curbed, people at risk are assisted with options to help them relocate elsewhere in the city, and immediately develop policy that requires full transparency on current polluters and on how any future industry is located in the city.

3. Do you support the creation of a Chicago Department of the Environment?

Yes, as stated in my first answer. This is a priority.

4. How will you address preservation and protection of our lakefront to include fighting lakefront erosion and supporting ecosystem projects?

I've got some experience on these issues from my work in City Council, primarily by working next to a very capable lakefront Alder.

First of all, we have to consider erosion a serious problem. Our beaches are a treasure to our people, a hallmark of our city, and create a natural wonder that draws tourism and adds to our quality of life.

There currently are several concerns about beaches, which comprise the entire length of our city, each with different issues. I would be sure environmental activists and leaders were advising on each of these projects.

- 1) We must ensure that the lakefront on the South Side is as cared for and nourished as those in the rest of the city. In this area there is a specific concern that the historic limestone revetments will be replaced with concrete, fundamentally altering their beauty and architectural integrity. This is along the shoreline between 47th and 51st streets, the Morgan Shoal area affectionately known as Pebble Beach to the locals.

This would be a violation of the Memorandum of Understanding on Promoting Equitable Access to Nature in Nature-Deprived Communities signed by multiple government agencies in Sept. 2022. I would ensure this short-sighted, quick fix doesn't happen.

- 2) Further north there are areas of the beach that need repair either through sand replenishment, new or repaired seawall barriers, or both. I would ensure this work takes place before our beaches are further damaged and we threaten historic buildings.
- 3) Finally, we have nature conservation areas, especially on the lakefront and near the future Obama Center, that have been neglected. This has harmed not only the wildlife in these areas, but degraded the appearance of our parks and public land. I would make this an immediate priority.

3) Health

1. What will you do to improve mental health services and how?

We need a significant improvement in mental health services in several ways. First, for our citizens in need who have never had adequate mental health services from the city, especially since Mayor Emanuel closed six clinics with absolutely no plan to replace the services provided. Second, we need more mental health services provided in response to 911 calls. About 40% of 911 calls are related to people experiencing mental trauma and they should be handled by mental health and / or drug counselors - either alone or with an officer. (This also frees up police to work on apprehending criminals and making Chicagoans feel safer.) And we need to offer our police officers significantly improved mental healthcare, both through the department and through their health insurance. The spate of police suicides is the most tragic evidence of how this department has been mismanaged. Deploying overworked police who are suffering from exhaustion, trauma and other issues makes them less effective in their jobs, and sometimes more of a danger to those in neighborhoods that have been traditionally over-policed but under-protected.

2. What is your position on (a) Treatment Not Trauma, (b) opening closed mental health clinics, and (c) developing non-police responses to mental health emergencies?
 - (a) I'm working with the author of Treatment Not Trauma in the Health and Human Relations Committee I chair and hope to pass it before the new term.
 - (b) I favor opening more mental health clinics, but I also think we need to develop a broader and more powerful policy than relying on static, single-use clinics. When Mayor Emanuel closed six clinics I toured the remaining six and was told by staff I was the first elected official ever to do so. They were understaffed and underused. I will enact a more

dynamic policy that relies heavily on outreach where other city services are provided - from aid offices to health clinics to the DMV. People with mental health issues often need more outreach and assistance to find services than the city currently offers. Then I would begin offering mental health services in areas where the people in need already are. Once I staff up the department with more mental health and drug counseling professionals, I will have them keep hours in communities around the city. They could set up in a well-known community location in Humboldt Park on Mondays, Englewood on Tuesdays, and Hegewisch on Wednesdays, for example. We have to meet the people in need where they are, not just at six more static, underused facilities.

3. What will you do to ensure equitable access to acute care hospitals in the city?

Under a Sawyer Administration equity is always a top concern - services will be available to everyone regardless of income, insurance, and other barriers to good health care. Our responsibility is to encourage and incentivize medical centers and hospitals to set up facilities with both economic, racial and geographic equity.

4. What will you do to ensure seniors and the disabled are able to remain in their homes and have access to health care?

First, we must do a better job of promoting all currently available exemptions that far too many people aren't aware of. As an alderman I am routinely contacted by people about to lose a home when they could have been helped by one of many city programs. That sounds simple, but it's a real issue and a place to start.

I'd also seek an ordinance that creates a cap on how much a home assessment can increase in a year, particularly for seniors and long-term property owners. Protecting homeowners with an assessment cap after, say, 10 years, and then maybe a lower, more rigid cap after 20 years, etc.

I'm also interested in a city-backed, non-profit reverse mortgage or similar program that would allow people to stay in their homes as long as they are alive and physically capable. More of the value would be retained in their home than if they entered into the same arrangement with a for-profit company, and any heirs could arrange to buy the home from the city at a favorable price that pays the city only the cost of administering the program.

We also need to ensure that seniors are getting all the services and support they can from the city. They need streets and sidewalks that are safe and accessible, streetlights that work, and help with things such as lawn maintenance, basic home upkeep and shoveling snow. Those services could be provided by an intergenerational arrangement with youth organizations that could offer employment, mentoring and job / life-skills training.

5. How are you going to address structural racism in health care access?

We have to work with healthcare providers to open locations in our marginalized communities, potentially by offering them incentives or creating public-private partnerships to do so. I'd also like to see healthcare providers offer more mobile health services - an RV or mobile treatment vehicle that would visit neighborhoods where there are not enough healthcare assets to

provide physicals, vaccines, flu shots and other routine healthcare, while screening for more serious issues and referring patients for higher-level treatment if needed.

Studies have also shown telehealth has been helpful in bridging the disparity in healthcare by race and income. It would provide access to basic checkups and screenings to people with transportation issues, mobility issues, and other challenges to accessing healthcare.

4) Diversity/Inclusion

1. Given Chicago's racial and ethnic diversity, what is your position on how to unify our city in relation to race, ethnicity, cultural, and sex/gender orientation?

This seems like a much bigger question than can be answered here, but I'll offer a few ideas of how we start.

- 1) We ALL want to be safer. Crime creates fear, and fear creates paranoia. We aren't our best selves as people when we are afraid, and we aren't our best selves as a city. Like in so many issues, this begins with reducing crime and improving public safety. When people begin to feel safer they will go out more, feel more comfortable around people who aren't like them, and generally have more will to embrace one another.
 - 2) The police reform for which I fought seven years is an important step in this process. A reformed police department is a stronger police department. We need people in historically mistreated neighborhoods to begin to trust the police as part of feeling safer and being more willing to embrace others outside of their community.
 - 3) I plan to have a committee of advisors on almost every demographic, community, and interest in our city, but especially the ones that are marginalized - Black, Latinx, low-income, seniors, youth, LGBTQ, etc. I want their frequent and frank input on issues preventing unity and how to improve them both immediately and in terms of longer term systemic issues.
 - 4) I also want to have a robust, positive and effective anti-hate / pro-unity marketing plan that people will see over and over again until it becomes synonymous with life in Chicago.
2. How will you address the reparations movement with regard to American descendants of chattel slavery, stolen indigenous lands, etc.?

I am the founder of the Reparations Subcommittee in the Chicago City Council, and I had to fight Mayor Lightfoot to get that. I wanted a full committee, but this is all she would allow.

My vision is to create a structure of programs for all of the disenfranchised groups you list that would include scholarships, professional training services, low- and no-cost loans (unrelated to credit score) for home ownership, business development, and other programs to close the many gaps that exist - wealth gap, income gap, education gap, and many more.

3. What solutions will you propose for Chicago government to address systemic racism in city structures, especially in CPD, CPS, city government offices, etc.?

My successful effort to pass meaningful police reform is the model I would use. A major component of police reform is addressing systemic racism in that system.

I would apply its principles to all the city government offices, including CPD, CFD, CPS and all government agencies.

4. What have you done to address policies and practices specifically regarding harm to or support for American Descendants of Slavery and Indigenous peoples?

See above, I founded the reparations sub-committee and was the driving force behind police reform..

I have been active on all issues of importance to Black, Brown and other marginalized communities my entire career. I either sponsored or supported ordinances to help low-wage workers, rideshare drivers, home healthcare workers, gig workers and others, many of whom are from these specific communities.

5) Safety / Police / Accountability / Equity

1. What is your plan to support city compliance with the federal consent decree and ensure accountability in police use of force, training, discipline, etc.?

This is a simple answer. I will demand compliance on the schedule laid out in the decree, and I'll accept no excuses. As soon as elected I will promote a new Police Superintendent from within the ranks of CPD - someone who has the trust and respect of the rank and file, who knows Chicago's culture and its crime - and make sure they share my belief that complying with the consent decree is a top priority.

2. What will you do to improve public safety and increase our sense of security?

I have a plan that makes Chicago safer on Day One of a Sawyer Administration, while also taking a longer-approach to an ever-improving police department in terms of its effectiveness, and its ability to engage in modern, progressive techniques such as de-escalation, community engagement and intervention.

First, I will create an auxiliary police force that brings back retired officers and uses people from other departments - off-duty firefighters, EMS, etc - for things such as crowd control and responding to 911 calls in which the victim is no longer at risk. Last year we had nearly 30,000 911 calls that took an hour to be answered and some never were. Not only are those people traumatized by the fact they called the most serious emergency response network there is and were treated with absolutely no urgency, the people who victimized them got a head start of an hour or more on the police - and we know the crimes that are responded to the fastest are solved most frequently. This response team would be trained to get the pertinent information, get it out on the police scanner, prepare the victim for further steps in the investigation, and then make sure they are safe and refer them to any additional services they need.

Next, I will have the federal government replace the 250 senior officers we have patrolling our airports with federal agents and put them in more urgent duties.

Then I'd make CPD a destination department that draws the best talent from around the nation - a place known for reform and modern tactics where officers want to work. Not only would this be enhanced by better academy training with a reform mentality, but they would receive first-in-class mental health services. The spate of recent police suicides shows officers have been mismanaged and worked to exhaustion, and that's good for them or safe for our people.

3. How will you improve the relationship between police and communities?

I've spelled this out with my answers on my police reform legislation and how I would comply with the consent decree.

4. What alternatives to current policing practices will you pursue to improve public safety?

As mentioned above, the most modern training in de-escalation, community engagement and intervention, as well as mental health and drug counselors helping with emergency calls.

6) Urban Planning / Housing / Homelessness / Infrastructure

1. Will you support the Bring Chicago Home Ordinance? Why or why not?

While I support the intent of this law, I think it has several flaws that will render it ineffective. I would develop an impactful and immediate plan to significantly reduce our homeless population, however.

My problem with Bring Chicago Home is that the money raised will go primarily to developers and other middlemen, not to the actual needs of the homeless. And the tax will harm our efforts to increase our population and keep Chicago a big, powerful, economic engine.

A better plan would be to first take the thousands and thousands of vacant and abandoned properties and refurbish units to house the people we can help most immediately. Then we would work with non-profits in the tiny home and alternative housing space to begin outreach to the large portion of the homeless population who need more than just a house, they need therapy and wrap-around services to leave their displaced community and move into a residence.

2. What will you do to promote affordable housing preservation and development?

This is a crucial issue we have to tackle from several angles.

First, we have to create an office focused exclusively on developing and maintaining affordable homes - from creation to ensuring they are safe and dignified. That office would work with other social service agencies to identify and overcome current obstacles, work with non-profit

organizations that would help build safe, sustainable housing (tiny homes, shared and multi-family units), and work with all the relevant departments that oversee building.

Then we should use affordable housing as a redevelopment tool to revive neighborhoods in need. I would use empty and abandoned buildings that can be rehabbed, vacant land, and other existing city assets that are a burden on disinvested communities.

And I would tie fees from developments in wealthier areas to affordable housing citywide, not just in the area where they are building. Large developers have told me they are often hesitant to build here because our city is unresponsive and painfully slow in permitting. These developers would pay a significantly enhanced permitting fee for a focused, streamlined process on a timetable that is predictable and guaranteed, assuming no deficiencies.

3. How would you work with communities and local community organizations regarding neighborhood development and investing in Chicago's disinvested communities?

Well, the answer above includes some of the steps. I'd also create commissions in all 77 communities to advise on what development their communities need. Every neighborhood should be self-sustaining with recreation, entertainment, professional services and economic opportunity.

4. How do you plan to improve residential streets, sidewalks, lighting, parks, and green alleys, and bicycle lanes and paths?

This is an area in which simply making something a priority is a big step. We know streets, sidewalks, lights, bike lanes and everything on this list degrades over time, and we need comprehensive long-term planning and budgeting to have regular maintenance, upgrades and replacement scheduled.

We also have to empower CDOT and related agencies to perform maintenance, upgrades and replacements on a predictable schedule. It should never be a sudden surprise or a budget crisis to replace a sidewalk or bike lane.

7) Immigration

1. How will you maintain and promote Chicago's status as a sanctuary city? What would you do differently, especially in response to immigrants being sent to Chicago?

I was proud of ordinances from my committee supporting our sanctuary city status, and I will continue to support such laws. As mayor, I'd add more actions to proactively ensure the safety of these displaced people and delivery of services to them.

This is another area in which planning is critical. It wasn't a major surprise that migrants were delivered to our city by Southern governors, but our current mayor acted as if it was. We need to have a plan and capacity in our system for situations such as this.

It also means frequent, open communications with both the migrant advocates and the communities in which they are placed. I would engage the existing communities early and have an ongoing dialogue with them about how new residents would be housed and served in their communities. It shouldn't come as last-minute information that a migrant center will be placed in a community with only a few days notice.

2. Will you increase funding to the Department of Family and Support Services to help address the current migrant crisis?

I would ensure the budget is what is needed to safely house and serve migrant families, though I think the problem is more in the planning than in the overall dollar amount.

8) Education

1. Given the history of under-investment in neighborhood schools, particularly in communities of color, what specific measures will you take to ensure high quality education in all Chicago public schools?

CPS spends more than any other school system in America per student - currently about \$30,000, and yet our outcomes are often bad and getting worse. It is crucial we right-size the administration and bureaucracy of CPS first. There are far too many administrators, and not enough teachers, nurses, librarians, counselors, nurses, etc.

Once the school closing moratorium ends in 2025 we have to look at a well-planned, thoughtful, consolidation of resources. We have far too many schools under-enrolled at 20%, 10%, even 5%. These schools frequently have the worst student test scores and outcomes. (I realize there is more to education than test scores, but it's one of many benchmarks that show we are failing these students.) A school so under-enrolled it can't field a sports team, have a debate club, a theater program or any of the tools to assist with social and emotional development is not serving its students.

Our commitment to educating students must be to the students, not to empty buildings. Maybe that means building one new, state-of-the art school that consolidates two or three others and makes much more efficient use of resources for the goal of producing educated, emotionally healthy children with good social development.

To be clear, this isn't an effort to cut the budget. I don't want to do that. I want to keep or even increase the budget, but make sure it is getting to the education of students.

Then I'd want educational experts to look at our highest performing selective enrollment and magnet schools and develop similar models and redeploy some of the best talent into our neighborhood schools.

2. What is your position on charter schools?

I'm against charter schools and any policy that takes money from our public schools and causes the further erosion of CPS.

3. By 2027 Chicago will have a fully elected school board. What measures do you advocate that will lead to equitable school board membership? Do you support limits on campaign financing in school board elections? Should elected school board members be paid for their service?

Yes, I'd like the elected representative school board to actually be representative of the community. It should include parents with children in CPS, educational experts and experts in non-profit finance, not special interests who get elected because of a financial advantage.

I'd like to see members get a stipend that covers their cost of serving - enough to compensate them for their time and commitment, but not a career-level salary.

4. Do you support a continued moratorium on school closings?

I support the current moratorium that goes through 2025. We needed that pause after Mayor Emanuel closed 50 schools with absolutely no plan on how to care for the displaced students or how the closures would affect their communities.

But we have schools such as Frederick Douglass Academy which is at 5% or less of full enrollment. We have to have a commitment to high-quality education, not just nearly empty buildings.

The simple, binary yes/no ideology on school closings is far too simplistic. How are we serving these students when we have only 44 kids in a school meant for 900 and they have no nurse, no librarian, no counselor, no sports, debate club or extracurricular activities? We are failing them not only in their education but in the social and emotional growth and development that happens in school.

9) Art & Culture

1. How will you support culture, equity, and the arts in Chicago – both for organizations as well as for individual artists and collectives (visual arts/theatre/dance/music)?

The first step is to hire a strong advocate for the arts to lead the Department of Cultural Affairs, someone who knows our artistic community and how to best use its resources.

I favor a robust grants program for both individual artists and collectives, grants and tax breaks for arts spaces, and the creation of arts districts across the city, especially in disinvested communities where it could also be an economic boon to the area.

2. Will you support a funding increase for arts education, sports, and extracurricular programs in our schools and parks?

Yes. I consider this a priority for a world class city in which people enjoy a full quality of life and children have an opportunity to enjoy all the arts the world has to offer. Chicago has a rich tradition in this area and it would be a crime if that were to diminish.