

**PRESTON HOLLOW DEMOCRATS – DALLAS CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATE  
QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Candidate Name: Gay Donnell Willis**

**Council District: 13**

**1. Describe your experiences and skills that have prepared you to be a member of the Dallas City Council, and on what committees would you like to serve to best use those skills and experiences.**

I have served the city of Dallas in a multitude of ways, because I genuinely care, so have a depth and breadth of experience across some of our city's most pressing needs that are unmatched in this race. I would work with the Mayor to serve where I think my knowledge and skills would best be put to use.

**City of Dallas Boards & Commission Service:**

**2019-2020 Community Development Commission**

Commissioners contribute to recommendations to the City Manager and City Council on the use of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and other U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Grant funds. Financial Oversight Vice Chair and Public Improvement Committee Vice Chair

**2010 - 2018 Vickery Meadow Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Board of Directors**

The Board makes recommendations to the City Council concerning the administration of the District. (Ann Margolin's appointee from 2010-2012, reappointed by Councilmember Gates)

**2012 - 2018 Vickery Meadow Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Board of Directors**

The Board makes recommendations to the City Council concerning the administration of the District.

**2017 City of Dallas Bond Committee, Sub Committee for Critical Facilities**

The sub-committee researched and made recommendations to the City Council regarding repairs, improvements, and construction of Dallas Police Department, Dallas Fire Department, arts and culture and administrative facilities to be included in the 2017 bond election.

**Dallas Independent School District Service:**

**DISD 2020 Bond Committee, Sub Committee for Safety & Security**

- Leadership ISD Inaugural Class '10
- Conrad High School Site Based Decision Making Committee
- Conrad High School PTSA Founding Member

**Professional Associations**

- North Dallas Chamber of Commerce – Public Safety Committee Chair
- Certified Fund Raising Executive© (CFRE)
- Leadership ISD Inaugural class '10
- Leadership Dallas '14
- Leadership Texas Women '17
- Dallas Breakfast Group
- Dallas Friday Group

**Community Service Leadership**

- Schreiber Extended Neighborhood Patrol (SENP) Board of Directors Vice President 2019-Present

- Vickery Community Action Team Member
- Junior League of Dallas
  - Community Vice President
    - Lead Community Program of 1,100 volunteers, 40 nonprofit agencies and two grant making committees who distributed over \$1.1million to the community
  - Underwriting Chair
  - Research & Planning Chair
  - Sustaining Advisor to Fund Development
  - T.Boone Pickens Leadership Institute (JLD) Inaugural Class
- TexProtects 2018 Gala Dinner Co-Chair (with Hon. Margaret Keliher)
- Walk to End Alzheimer’s 2013 & 2014 Co-Chair
- The Family Place Partners Card 20th Anniversary Co Chair
- Friends of the Dallas Public Library Gala 2013 Co-Chair
- Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation, Charter Cohort

**Education & Membership Associations**

Dallas Holocaust Museum & Human Rights Museum, Charter Member  
 Texas Tech Alumni Association  
 Alpha Delta Pi – DFW Alumnae  
 Semones Family YMCA

**2. What are your top three priorities if you are elected to City Council?**

- a. Support new DPD Chief Garcia’s initiatives around 21<sup>st</sup> Century policing, including a focus on community policing which builds trust between communities and police, is critical.
- b. Driving the “catch up” for street, sidewalk and alley improvements, as outlined in the 2017 bond program, that has been lagging since 2019
- c. Growing our tax base by swiftly solving the myriad issues at the permitting office to accelerate smart development all over Dallas

**3. We are a Democratic club. Would the Democratic party platform and values inform your service on the Dallas City Council, and if so, how?** Social and economic fairness lifts up people and our whole community, and that reflects my mindset. My *Neighborhoods First* platform has opportunity built in via public safety where all can feel safe in their homes, can have economic opportunity to contribute to growing our overall tax base, and know that street/alley/sidewalk improvements around the city are being treated equitably.

**4. What changes would you support to Dallas city government, including the police department, to enhance public safety in our community?** Thinking bigger, differently and creatively is the way to create positive change in public safety. For example, piloting the Right CARE program to dispatch mental health professionals along with a police officer can divert sending a human in crisis to the jail or ER, and instead link them to services that can help them stabilize toward a better life. This was a different approach to tackle a big problem, and creative in that it was piloted through a grant to test it before including it in the City budget. In it’s first year this program was able to redirect 31% of calls from jail and hospital ERs in the zip code where RIGHT Cares was implemented, to more appropriate healthcare services.

I support a philosophy and programs that address the core problem that is creating “criminal behavior,” such as poverty, education, housing, and employment, otherwise we will not meaningfully increase our public safety and security. Ensuring that the KPMG staffing study implementation, which outlined realignment of sworn officers to have

greater presence in the community, is completed by July is another example of the accountability I would bring to City Council.

**5. Homelessness is an increasing problem in our community and has become more visible in our council district. What do you believe is the best way to address this problem, both from the perspective of the persons experiencing homelessness and the surrounding community?**

I've talked with and listened to people who are homeless, and knowing that they have a place to lay their head each night makes them better able to accept and engage with the services they need to put their lives on a better path forward. Housing stability is the foundation for meaningfully addressing other human aspects of homelessness, like drug addiction, mental health issues, poverty, racial equity, education, and employment. "Housing first" projects that provide supportive housing with wraparound services are how we begin to eradicate this issue. I would ensure that the City of Dallas is a partner in supporting projects like those that the Catholic Housing Initiative and City of Refuge have or are creating. There has been inconsistency at the Office of Homeless Solutions, and I would keep resolving that, as well as how we work with others in the community (MDHA, CoC, etc.) in my focus.

I must also note that my *Neighborhoods First* platform would also ensure that neighbors are given their timely right to have their voices heard regarding the location and nature of a proposed project.

**6. Our community was hit hard by the tornados in 2019 and has yet to recover. Homes and property were recently damaged by the severe winter weather. Does the City have a role in assisting with recovery, and if so, would you advocate for this and what would be your recommendations?**

Yes, we very much owe it to our community to be sure there is a plan in place for a variety of disasters. The full brunt of responsibility for the plan and execution may not be the City's, but the City can keep pressure on to be sure there IS A PLAN. During the recent freezing weather we saw each council member, nonprofits, and other entities scramble to find ways to shelter, feed, warm, and provide other basic human needs. The city has leverage points through Code Enforcement to ensure that issues like lack of water and burst pipes are remediated and repaired swiftly. I have a corporate background defined by performance and accountability, and being prepared for severe winter weather or any other disaster would be an expectation I'd bring with me to City Council.

With regard to the tornado, it is beyond disappointing that we did not receive federal assistance as we should have after that devastating event. Using the leverage points that the city has with regard to code enforcement and redevelopment, I would enact pressure to keep moving forward and build back better.

**7. Have you reviewed the City budget? If so, what is your biggest concern and what would be your proposed solution to that concern?**

Yes, I have reviewed the city budget. My biggest concern is the impending COVID-19-related revenue deficit we are facing for 2021-22. The solution is two-part: we must evaluate all programs and where necessary, sunset or shift responsibility where they might be more logically aligned (for example—public health programs may belong with the County vs. the City). Second, we are leaving money on the table and must "unclog" our permitting and inspection system, which is

estimated to have lost tax base growth of \$264 to \$382 million from March to November last year.

My *Neighborhoods First* platform means ensuring that we are not compromising the basic services that are our covenant with the taxpayer. I am the only candidate in this race that served on the 2017 Bond task force, and I was disappointed to see how much deferred maintenance was being pushed into a bond. That gives me particular insight and drive to be sure that we address these needs through our Operations & Maintenance budget vs. a bond package.