

# MEET THE CANDIDATES

The Times Free Press mailed each City Council candidate a letter asking them to answer a series of questions so readers could compare their stances on topics important to city leaders and residents. Responses have been edited for clarity and length.

## City Council race

Questions



**Anthony Byrd**  
**District:** 8  
**Age:** 41  
**Education:** No response  
**Job:** Hamilton County Court Clerk's Office

More than 20 years of service with the Hamilton County Courthouse.



**Moses Freeman**  
**District:** 8  
**Age:** 78  
**Education:** Tennessee State University, Bachelor of Science; University of Chattanooga; Southern University  
**Job:** City councilman, teacher, school counselor

Married Louise Doss Freeman in 1987.



**thomas p. kunesh**  
**District:** 8  
**Age:** 60  
**Education:** Defense Language Institute, Monterey Calif.; Universidad Complutense de Madrid; B.A. in Spanish, University of Minnesota; M.A., Religious Studies, University of Minnesota; Master of Divinity, Starr King School for the Ministry, Berkeley Calif.  
**Job:** Teacher (Spanish, Native American studies) and parent

Saving Moccasin Bend with the Chattanooga InterTribal Association. Also, got rid of racist UTC mascot, Chief Moccanooga; and re-created the state Commission of Indian Affairs.



**Pat Benson Jr.**  
**District:** 9  
**Age:** 27  
**Education:** University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Bachelor of Science in political science  
**Job:** Working with neighbors and police to successfully implement a block captain system

We need more police officers, cameras and community involvement to reduce crime. Also, we need to audit the VRI and get rid of any costly/ineffective parts of the plan. I've been fortunate enough to work with the Chattanooga Police Department and I want to equip them with every tool necessary to stop the rise in violent crime.



**Demetrus Coonrod**  
**District:** 9  
**Age:** 41  
**Education:** Bachelor of Science in sociology with minor in criminal justice  
**Job:** T-Mobile

My biggest accomplishment is pushing Ban the Box and mobilizing the community of Eastdale to stop another convenience store from opening to sell alcoholic beverages across from a church.

**What is your biggest accomplishment to date?**

**Crime and violence are key concerns for Chattanooga. What should the city and the council do to reduce crime and violence?**

**Given the makeup of your district, what will you do to encourage prosperity for your constituents and for the city residents as a whole?**

**What are the greatest infrastructure needs, such as sidewalks, paving, etc., in your district, and how would you go about addressing them?**

**What is the greatest challenge in your district in the next four years, and how do you plan to address it?**

Invest in the people, not politics.

Invest in the people. Make sure I am available and accessible to their needs.

Walk the block, talk with the neighborhood associations to address their needs.

Crimes, jobs and housing. By investing in the people, listening to their needs and voting on change the community needs.

It starts with convincing the community that we all own the problem, and it requires all segments of the community to reduce the incidence of gun violence and crimes of all types. Businesses need to take a closer look at all applicants and provide "second chances" where possible. Opportunities should be offered to African-American men and provided with necessary training while working.

Workforce development is an important element in the vitality of our community. The key is preparation and training with opportunities, beginning at the earliest age. We will continue to work at attracting a manufacturing concern to locate at the former Harriet Tubman site that will hire residents of that area, resulting in others moving to the area to work there.

Paving is the greatest need, by far. Streets such as M.L. King Boulevard desperately need paving, along with Dodson Avenue, Willow Street, Central Avenue, part of Main Street and many others. Sidewalks and sidewalk repair is the second greatest need. I will continually advocate for adding sidewalks in my district and work with neighborhood associations to list the "greatest need" as they see it.

Many neighborhoods, including Avondale, Bushtown, Churchville, parts of East Chattanooga, and Lincoln Park are in need of stabilization and revitalization. Oak Grove, Clifton Hills and Park City also fall within this category. We must use the Neighborhood Services Program to help strengthen these neighborhood organizations and use the planning agency to help them work through developing a land-use plan.

Apply equal financial resources to the cause of the problem as the city currently applies to the results: provide early childhood education programs for all 3- and 4-year-olds in Districts 7, 8 and 9. Recruit African-American male teachers for our schools. Restart police foot patrols and establish precinct offices in north and south District 8. ... And pay equal attention to the minor crimes and traffic safety violations that are better seen on foot.

We have created a ring of poverty around the city by focusing on building up downtown and wealthy people moving to the suburbs. In between are the poor stuck in low-paying jobs. The City Council needs to stop giving away our tax money to corporations through the PILOT program. Raise the city's minimum wage for all city workers to \$15/hour.

My district is so diverse that different areas have different needs. Downtown, the Southside, mostly rezoning and smart development. St Elmo, more police presence because of break-ins in cars and homes and speeders. Alton Park, East Lake and Cedar Hill need all of the above, plus lots of paving for the whole district.

Representation of three different racial groups in a predominantly poor area on a City Council geared toward development, construction and big money for the wealthy who, for the most part, live miles away. Solving the problem of inequality in schools and jobs and housing, in which the ring around the city gets poorer as the city and suburbs get richer. Diversifying neighborhoods with new businesses, and increasing city contracts to more minority-owned businesses.

My nine-point plan details several steps we need to take to encourage prosperity. It starts with vocational/technical training and empowering citizens to help their community by being productive members of society. If elected, I will work with the major hospitals in my district to provide health care job skills and employment to residents.

Our roads desperately need repaving. The sidewalks need to be better maintained. Also, the streetlights need work since they continually burn out. The biggest infrastructure needs are sewer system improvements and a long-term solution to the Wilcox Tunnel. Chattanooga will continue to grow over the next few decades, and we need someone with the vision and work ethic to help make it happen.

The greatest challenge in my district is two parts: Reducing crime and increasing economic opportunities. I encourage everyone to read my nine-point plan for District 9 where I offer cost-effective solutions to the problems we face. We'll need the help of all our residents, especially business and religious officials. However, it starts with getting a new councilman.

I love our community and I know we are capable of so much more. Violent crime, housing problems and unemployment have plagued our area for too long. I don't think city government can solve every problem, but we at least need someone who will ... fight for what's right. If elected, I will work my tail off to give my constituents the representation they deserve.

The city and council should treat violence and crime as a public health issue. We need to use campaigns and technology to reach every child and family, ... to make sure that everybody feels important and cared for through parenting interventions, family interventions, well-being campaigns, and early childhood education. This policy will address those who are at risk and treat those affected through a network of volunteers, mediators and city officials.

Prosperity is a noun. Being prosperous is something we all can visualize. I would encourage constituents to become entrepreneurs, attain higher education or trade, and engage their community.

Paving and sidewalks. I would review the budget with a scope to make sure that sidewalks and paving are recommended and completed. I also would vote for city works to provide the services rather than being outsourced. I would monitor the process so infrastructure needs are taken care of within the budget year.

Improving education. I would work with Hamilton County to close the funding gap, invest in preschool programs, quality child care and early literacy. We have to create stronger community environments that support better schools and student achievement by using city services and resources. I also recommend community schools.