

# 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.



**Jeffrey Evans**

**District: 5**

Did not respond

## City Council race

Questions



**Incumbent**

### Yusuf Hakeem

**District: 9**

**Age: 68**

**Education:** Completed Chattanooga State, electronics; studies in criminal justice and political science, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

**Job:** Retired, full-time councilman



### John L. Kerns

**District: 9**

**Age: 37**

**Education:** University of Tennessee at Knoxville

**Job:** Owner, Preferred Care at Home



### Ken Smith

**District: 3**

**Age: 44**

**Education:** Attended UTC

**Job:** Chattanooga city councilman; chief information officer at the Johnson Group



### Darrin Ledford

**District: 4**

**Age: 46**

**Education:** University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

**Job:** Owns and operates ImageWorks Printing + Graphics



### Carol Berz

**District: 6**

**Age: 77**

**Education:** Ph.D. in social policy, University of Tennessee; J.D., Nashville School of Law; master's in administration, UT; and a B.A. in human services.

**Job:** Owner and CEO of Private Dispute Resolution Services LLC

## UNOPPOSED CANDIDATES

What is your biggest accomplishment to date?

The Wilcox Tunnel community effort. For decades, the community has cried out for improvements to the tunnel. Through my efforts in government and business with community leaders and residents of the district, we got \$2 million in improvements, a community grant to beautify the entrances, and a \$25 million bond commitment from city government with the intent of getting matching funds from the federal government.

To date, my biggest accomplishment is the overall success of my company, Preferred Care at Home. In seven years we've helped thousands of clients, grown to more than 80 employees. And in 2015, it was named a finalist for the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce's Small Business of the Year Award in its largest category.

As chairman of Public Works and Transportation, I successfully led the effort to double the city's paving budget while resolving legal issues that will allow the city to take the next step to repaving Northpoint Boulevard. I also passed legislation implementing a new policy regarding tire disposal that has halted illegal tire dumping citywide. Lastly, I look forward to opening our new fire station that will improve fire protection services throughout Hixson.

No response

I am most proud of the economic turnaround in District 6. And of all the matters my constituents said were important to them, many have been accomplished. We still have a lot to do, and the exciting part is the "we" who are doing it together.

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

Provide police with effective and proven technology. Support and endorse the increase of manpower for CPD. Provide guidance and support in CPD building trust within the District 9 neighborhoods. Fight for increased investment in public education, workforce development and job readiness programs for individual and family, increased wages, increased full time employment opportunities and affordable housing for District 9 residents.

We have to re-commit and further invest in the police strategies around focused deterrence, while defunding aspects of our campaign that haven't demonstrably proven their effectiveness here in Chattanooga. The council must insist on complete transparency in all aspects of VRI, and demand that each program prove its efficacy in keeping our neighborhoods safe.

Supporting our police officers and ensuring they have the needed resources to do their jobs is the first step. Providing the Real Time Intelligence Center and ballistics database are a few examples of increasing effectiveness and investigative resources. We must increase job training, education and other support services. This will help reclaim our communities child by child, family by family, and neighborhood by neighborhood.

Reducing crime is not a simple process. We have to be honest in that the number of shootings in our city has not been reduced over the past few years. Our Chattanooga Police Department is doing a fantastic job of getting key individuals off our streets [but] all too often, these violent criminals are back on the streets in record time. We need an honest review of the VRI and explore how we can... better prosecute these individuals and keep them off the streets.

I favor continuing the VRI. Crime is a social issue that cannot be "policed" out of existence. It can be positively addressed with quality vocational education; workforce development for living wage jobs; continued development and support for youth development programs; and an understanding of financial literacy, and general family support programs.

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

I'm excited to introduce my Working Together Works "District 9 Workforce Development Initiative," providing a sustainable employment foundation for ALL District 9 citizens, especially for those underemployed, underskilled and unemployed. I have worked to establish a workforce development plan through collaborative community partnerships that are now in place. (MSI Workforce Solutions LLC, Tech Town Foundation Tech Workforce Program Champion)

The key to closing opportunity gaps is to prioritize place. Chattanooga government doesn't do a good enough job of meeting people where they are. By naming specific neighborhoods that need more attention and prioritizing those communities for recruiting employers, deploying tax abatement programs, and promoting diverse housing, we can find innovative ways to ensure that our neighborhoods are places of belonging for everyone.

Continue to work toward making Chattanooga more business friendly by preventing and/or reducing unnecessary fees, regulations and processes that prevent businesses from expanding and creating jobs while protecting the interests of the community. Strategically identifying and responding to growth opportunities so the city can manage the demands growth will place on them and ensuring that all citizens enjoy their city's prosperity.

Economic growth is happening fast in District 4, and I will encourage growth that benefits our residents and businesses so we can hold the line on property taxes. We must be more business-friendly and rethink current policies so we don't lose business to the county. Understanding that District 4 borders the county increases competition. We already have factors that work against us... such as taxes, higher stormwater regulations and inadequate roads.

Make certain that all stakeholders (ie: residents and leaders in the public and private sectors) are included in decision-making that engenders quality public education. There must be a level playing field that includes, a living wage; quality, affordable child care; quality, affordable health care; access to higher education; access to transportation; and finally, an understanding by the established power structure that diversity enhances the bottom line.

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

Safe and accessible paved sidewalks. My established relationships working with the current administration and City Council during the budgeting process are vital to continuing the current progress. While I have been able to champion increasing the paving budget to \$5 million for District 9, I know there are still more funds that need to be allocated to the safety and accessible sidewalks for the citizens of District 9.

District 9's infrastructure needs are vast, and urgent — road resurfacing, streetscapes, green spaces and sidewalks. The only way we'll see results in improving infrastructure in Chattanooga's inner city is with significant commitment to these projects reflected in the capital budget.

District 3 has a number of poorly maintained roads and sewer line settlements that have not had much attention in previous years. I will continue to demand paving budget increases every year and push for more equitable and equal portions of that budget be spent in District 3. The national ASCE estimates that continued underinvestment in infrastructure will cost each U.S. family \$3,400 a year over the next decade. We cannot continue to ignore this essential need.

District 4 has several roads that need serious attention, including Davidson, Igou Gap and Jenkins Road. I plan to immediately advocate for increasing the city paving budget to the study-recommended \$5 million. The current council has done a great job in increasing this budget over the last four years to \$3.5 million, but we must make our roads a priority.

We need to implement multimodal transportation plans that include sidewalks and accessible public transportation and not just concentrate on the inner city. CARTA could service more riders if there were sidewalks that safely got riders to and from their stops. The biggest challenge, however, is repaving streets that are in need of repair. I will continue to support policies that encourage public/private partnership funding necessary to address these issues.

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

My goal is to continue building on the foundation that has been laid through working together with District 9 citizens, City Council members and the city to increase access, opportunity and hope for the future of every District 9 citizen through my Working Together Works "District 9 Workforce Development Initiative."

District 9's biggest challenge is economic. Many families are supported on a single income — or less. Too many of our neighbors don't enjoy the promise of the Chattanooga Way, and don't know the benefit of living in the Gig City. Reversing this means forging a new, cohesive vision for the future of Chattanooga.

The condition of our roads along with a significant increase in new development will continue to be a challenge. We need to be thinking ahead, planning for increasing populations and the impact on transportation, traffic and many other aspects of everyday life.

Improving our roads and infrastructure, promoting a business friendly environment and supporting efforts that help our police and fire departments do their job of keeping us safe and secure. I believe it is imperative that we focus on the future, live in the present and learn from the past.

Economic development and growth. I will continue to address by emphasizing quality workforce development, reinforce educational programs that provide livable-wage jobs and support initiatives that promote financial literacy and offer alternatives to predatory lending; encouraging private sector involvement in workforce development.