

*Peter Westerholm*

Metro Council At-Large



***Providing For Our Children***

Educating all of our children is the most important priority for Nashville. The Metro Council must do more than approve the board's budget request; as community leaders we must be advocates for public schools. I believe in public schools and I believe Nashville can be proud of our schools if we continue to improve them. We must raise our expectations: in our children, our teachers, and our parents. All of Nashville has a vested interest in a vibrant network of schools that prepare our children for the jobs of tomorrow. We must all demand and expect more as we move into the economy of the new century.

If we improve and invest in our schools, it will be easier to take care of negligent behaviors like truancy and gang membership. Positive reinforcement by a combination of government, police, the faith-based community, schools, and parents will keep our children on a promising path. This will benefit families while leading to a safer, smarter environment to foster the next generation of Nashville's leadership.

When education is properly addressed, the economic development and quality of life will bring out the best in Nashville. As a city, we must show that we believe in educating all of our children, and that we care enough to move forward together.

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***Safeguarding Our Tax Dollars***

The Metro Council is the steward of Davidson County's tax dollars. With over four years of experience in the Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration, I will bring a unique expertise in public finance to the council.

With the passage of Metro Charter Amendment 1 last year, which restricts the Council's authority to increase property tax revenue, the council will have to manage its existing revenue very well. I fully understand that budgets necessarily involve limits. I know the dangers of using non-recurring (one-time) funds for recurring program expenses. I also know how important the credit rating of Metro government is to budget management. Right now, 11% of our recurring funds are spent on our city's debt. To keep our debt service payments low, we must protect our city's high credit rating.

We can keep our tax burdens low if the Metro Council sticks to 'Results Matter' performance measurement. Budget requests should be analyzed along with performance information, which can improve the services government delivers at a lower cost.

Finally, transparency in government should be a top priority. Communicating openly with the public is one of the best tools a governing body can use to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and ethics in governmental duties. Public budget hearings and community outreach promote confidence in the government and ensure that Council members are operating and allocating money in an ethical manner.

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***Increasing Our Transit Options***

As much as Nashville has grown over the past decade, it is anticipated that we will continue to grow even more in coming years. With this acknowledgement comes the responsibility to begin preparing for the needs of tomorrow today. We now have an opportunity to address long term infrastructure needs that will accommodate growth for decades to come, the most important of these being our transit systems.

The precondition to having workable transportation alternatives is to plan Nashville's growth correctly. Higher density properly placed along major arterial routes makes mass transit effective, convenient, and practical. By focusing future growth along these lines, we will also be able to protect our open spaces, historic neighborhoods, and neighborhood parks and greenspaces.

We must also encourage 'urban village' development in many parts of our city. This concept mixes commerce and housing in close proximity, providing residents with shopping, entertainment, and restaurants; all within walking or bicycling distance. Not only will this reduce congestion in the immediately surrounding areas, but once these developments are linked to a comprehensive transit system, more people could effectively function without a car. With the increased densities of the urban core, a system of shuttle buses would go a long way to keep short-trip traffic as low as possible.

Nashville is reaching a point where we must look beyond more roads and more lanes. To ensure a transit system be successful, it must be built upon the foundation of smart city planning. That is what the 'Smart Growth, Smart Nashville' concept is all about.

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***Preserving Our Environment***

Our quality of life starts with our environment. To protect our quality of life, it is important that we are stewards of our natural environment as well as our built environment. Nashville is poised to blaze the trail in this area by committing to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environment Design) certified new construction and renovations for public buildings. As is the case with the renovated Historic Courthouse and Public Square, we see how a green roof can be a centerpiece for functionality, efficiency, and aesthetic virtue. By promoting sustainable, environmentally-friendly construction and lifestyle habits, we can realize economic and efficiency benefits that improve our quality of life.

Focused, smart growth and development using neighborhood village design help protect open spaces and parks for all of our residents for generations to come. These parks provide natural beauty and complement the streetscapes of a vibrant city. Nashville needs more greenspaces with walking and biking trails to promote both exercise and relaxation. Especially in our urban core, more park space is needed. What would New York be without Central Park?

Recycling will be a priority of my service on the Metro Council. We must reduce the amount of garbage we produce. Our residents, our businesses, and our government must work together to make recycling easier, cost-efficient, and habitual. Curbside recycling must become more frequent to more Nashvillians.

Sprawl leads to higher costs to the city's infrastructure, which leads to higher costs of delivering services, which costs the taxpayers money. We can protect our valuable open spaces for future generations while keeping the tax burden low for the current generation.

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***Supporting Our Cultural Development***

Nashville is Music City U.S.A. Our identity is important, for it brings in tourists, aspiring artists, entrepreneurs, students, and other professionals with a creative vision and a dream for a better life. We must take advantage of that creative energy.

Our musical heritage is well established and we display it proudly, whether it's a honky-tonk or a world-class symphony hall. We also have rich traditions in the performing arts, as well as visual arts and crafts, that attract visitors from all over. The arts are a proven economic investment that brings stable returns for the benefit of the entire community.

Arts also are a critical component of our children's education. We should look at arts education not as extracurricular activities, but as enabling subjects that open up the potential of the other classroom subjects.

As the son of a librarian, I appreciate the important part our libraries play in community outreach and education. As much as any other type of community center, our libraries offer us places to come together and share our love of learning, and to inspire a love of learning in others. I will work hard to make our library system even stronger, and to ensure that all of our residents have access to their wealth of knowledge.

Our identity greatly revolves around our downtown, and we work to make sure it is a safe, hospitable, and enjoyable place for residents and tourists alike. As we prepare for the future, we must make sure our decisions for a new riverfront, a new convention center, and homes for our hometown athletic organizations are done so in a manner that protects and enhances our quality of life for years to come while still remaining fiscally responsible.