

NOVELLA SMITH ARNOLD'S RESPONSES TO
COMMERCIAL APPEAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

List any experiences that you believe have helped prepare you to serve in the office you are seeking.

Distinguished career in broadcasting (Houston and Memphis) and recording (at Stax Records).

Executive Director of the Black Arts Alliance.

After the demise of Stax and then a divorced Mom, I became an IBM account executive.

Executive Director for the Criminal Justice Ministry an outreach of Calvary Episcopal Church.

Founder of Calvary's street ministry.

Chaplain for Calvary's AIDS Burial Ministry.

Volunteer chaplain with the The Med, for AIDS patients, especially children.

HIV/AIDS educator / counselor / tester for the health department (\$1/year volunteer)

What sets you apart from the other candidate or candidates in this race? Please be specific.

I have lived and worked at the center of my district for 28 years, so much a part of the community that "Chaplain Arnold" is an institution, not just a person.

As a chaplain and social activist for 28 years, I have fought tirelessly and fearlessly for the benefit of the most disadvantaged of our city.

In these capacities, I have worked directly with and for the county's criminal justice system and public health agencies, as well as with other county officials at all levels. Therefore, I know the county government very well.

I have no business interests. I am clearly in no one's pocket.

I can't be bought. When investigators ran a sting at the Shelby County jail about 15 years ago, they took out 27 deputy jailers and one chaplain with offers of cars, houses, and money – but not me.

I believe in telling the truth, even when people would prefer not to hear it. Ten years ago, in the face of widespread homophobia and denial, I raised the issue of HIV/AIDS spreading in the county jail and out into the community.

In what ways can ethical standards in federal, state and local government be improved? And what will you do, if elected to improve those standards?

In recent years, public policy at all levels has become too interlocked with business and private interests. As government budgets get squeezed and public policy issues have become more complex, private interests have been only too happy to jump in and help out. Even honest politicians may tend to rely too heavily on private advice.

Our best protections are (1) an open and transparent government, (2) clear and strict ethical codes, and (3) a vigorous, watchdog press that remains skeptical.

I will press for County adoption of detailed financial interest disclosure rules, and for an ethics code equal to the best practices in the nation. I want to see criminal penalties (not just censure) for the more serious violations. I would like the Commission to establish an independent audit group similar to the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

For Shelby County Commission and County Mayoral candidates, what is your position on city-county government and school consolidation?

Most of us know in our hearts that what we have today is broken and needs to be fixed. It's apparently the word "consolidation" that scares people. It implies that the goal is to eliminate one of the two governments. That is not even necessarily a foregone result.

Let's call it city-county realignment. The goals should be to:

- **Eliminate waste, inefficiency, and end turf wars. In the current fiscal climate, we cannot afford the waste of duplicative systems and services. Nor can we afford to spin our wheels over who gets the credit (or the blame).**
- **Enhance effectiveness and accountability. Let's put each function in the best hands, at the right level, with a single point of responsibility and accountability.**
- **Put the county and city back together on the same map. The county and city need to have a unified vision and a common set of goals.**

The school system, as much as any other part of government, must be on the table for realignment. The fact is that Shelby is the only major county in Tennessee where the schools aren't already consolidated. It's the county's fundamental job to guarantee our children the best education we can afford to all our residents. How can we live up to the promise that if we just parcel out and delegate our responsibilities?

With the city preparing to reexamine its own charter and responsibilities, now is the best time for the county to do the same. The two should work closely together on a unified redesign of government.

What steps should Shelby County government take to reduce its debt?

- **Actively discourage further sprawl with stronger planning and zoning.**
- **Impose development fees that are commensurate with the costs of sprawl.**
- **Realign, and where appropriate consolidate, city/county functions for greater efficiency and effectiveness.**
- **Reign in tax incentives, granting them only where there is a clear payback in new jobs.**
- **Inject more discipline into the budgeting process of county government. In the area of operations, we should look at a performance-based budgeting system which directly connects budgets and results. (See also my comment earlier about an independent audit group.)**
- **Consider some form of a commuter tax.**

What role should county government play in real estate development?

It is astounding that county government encouraged the most aggressive development outside of Memphis in its history without any master plan as its guide. It had no incentives or regulations that would have prevented disposable neighborhoods that have been built in some places. It had no incentives for density, and it had no commitment to planning.

Two years ago, some major local developers said to us on a local TV program, "We don't want to be part of the problem. Just tell us what you want us to do and we'll do it."

We should take them up on their offer.

The first step has already been taken: Commissioning an overhaul of the zoning maps and regulations (the Unified Development Code).

The next step is to adopt these changes and not let politics or private interests overrule good judgment.

The third step is to implement a tax and fee structure that discourages needless sprawl, while encouraging mixed-use redevelopment of urban spaces.

What are the advantages and disadvantages, in your opinion, of the boom in suburban development?

It's hard to think of advantages (except for the developers who benefited from the so-called boom).

Urban flight and unmanaged urban sprawl have had these disadvantages:

- **Forced the county to build new roads, schools, and services, while existing ones went underutilized and fell into decay.**
- **Forced the county to borrow too heavily to finance this infrastructure, with little or no growth in the tax base and revenues.**
- **Fostered, and then hardened, the socio-economic "Balkanization" of Shelby County.**
- **Led to separate-and-unequal quality of life and services throughout the county.**
- **Helped turn Memphis into the ugly stepchild of Shelby County - when in reality two-thirds of the County's residents live within the city's borders.**

"Smart growth" is a good thing, but in Shelby County *there is no growth*. The "boom" really hasn't been a boom. Many people have moved entirely out of the county. The rest of the movers have simply shifted out of the city to take over our green spaces.

What are the most important issues you expect to deal with in county government?

We are at a fiscal tipping point. Unfortunately, because Shelby County Government refused to make the hard choices over the past 20 years, we are faced with debt and debt service that will climb even more before they level off and fall. We can't keep patching a bald tire. We need responsible, long-term solutions, or the fiscal wheels will completely fall off. At the same time, we can't afford to jeopardize the quality of life for the county's residents, nor allow the county to become even less hospitable to those who might move here.

Increasing crime, gang activity, and drugs are scaring the hell out of all of us, and scaring others away from living in Memphis. We need to be tough on crime - but you can't fight crime one-handed. Public health and public education are just as much a part of the solution as police and jails. For example, if we fill our jails with the mentally ill and homeless, instead of treating them as a public health problem, we don't have room for the real criminals. Likewise, if we don't provide the right educational opportunities (and ensure attendance), we simply create more criminals to be jailed.

The need to restore the public's confidence in government. There is great discontent among the people of Shelby County. They feel that government is too

expensive, taxes are too high, crime is too frequent, and public ethics are too low. We need to return to the concept of public service based on citizenship rather than financial benefits or political power.