



**Rise Up West Virginia**

www.RiseUpWV.org

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## **Charleston City Council Candidate Questionnaire**

**Candidate Name:** Brandon S. Willard **Ward:** 12

1. "Housing first" is an approach to homelessness that prioritizes providing chronically homeless people with affordable housing and providing them with social services, rather than requiring social services as a precondition to accessing housing or criminalizing homeless populations. It has proven effective in dramatically reducing chronically homeless populations in other cities. Do you support a "housing-first" model for dealing with homelessness in Charleston?

**Yes**   No   Don't know

Please explain your position.

A logical solution to homelessness is a stable living space for those without. As I understand it, the housing first program is rooted in the hopes reconnecting individuals and families with safe and affordable housing with the hope of leading to permanent housing. Homelessness is a crisis that Charleston, like many other cities, must address. I think Housing First could be a viable option to pursue for our city, but it should be researched and studied to ensure its success. We should identify programs that have been successful in other areas and look to see if they might also be appropriate for Charleston. Additionally, we must secure responsible funding before starting such a program.

2. As a city council member, will you commit to hosting town halls in your district to solicit community input on redevelopment plans and other municipal issues?

**Yes**   No   Don't know

Please explain your position.

I am more than willing to host a town hall, or any other type of group meeting, when there is a topic or item that would require such a forum, whether it be for my ward or the city itself. Being able to listen to concerns and speak directly to my constituents about important matters will lead to meaningful discussions and allow us to work together toward possible solutions. Also, this would be an appropriate format to gather information from my ward to take to the council and other city leaders.

3. Do you support the CURA Commission following and funding the West Side Community Renewal Plan (2008)?

**Yes**    No    Don't know

Please explain your position.

Having taught on the west side for 10 years at Glenwood and Mary C Snow West Side Elementary Schools, I recall the beginning of the plan and watched some of it come to fruition. That said, there is still much that needs to be done and more that the city needs to look at in terms of supporting the plan and following through. Even though it is not part of my ward, the west side is special to me, and I feel strongly about improving its neighborhoods and its ties to the success of the city as a whole.

4. In 2016, the Charleston Police Department committed to an eight-point plan to begin combating racial disparities in policing and arrests [<http://wvmetronews.com/2016/10/04/charleston-police-announce-plan-to-improve-race-relations-community-engagement/>]. What are your specific ideas for building on and expanding this effort?

The eight-point plan is an essential plan for the city of Charleston. I would like to see that each of the points in this plan has a solid educational component. Education is the key to so many aspects of life, and addressing racial disparities is no different. Providing educational outreach across the community can enhance understanding and reduce injustices. Recruiting efforts that focus on minority demographics might also be beneficial. Our children need to see themselves reflected in the leaders and role models of their community. Building a positive relationship between law enforcement and the public will allow for this initiative to grow. Accurate measuring, documentation, and analysis of numbers relating to this plan will help inform those in the program as well as the community about its benefits to Charleston.

5. What services are you aware of in our community that provide activities, recreational facilities and after-school programs for young people? What would you do to support and expand such programs?

Our city has many dedicated programs available to our students such as Third Base, which is provided in 20 of Kanawha County's schools, five of which are in Charleston. Other programs, such as Pro Kids at the Bob Burdette Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Center, Boys and Girls Club, Fort Hill Child Development Center, as well as programs at the YWCA and YMCA, provide after school programs, opportunities, and child care. Other options for students are the many arts groups: Arts in Action, West Virginia Youth Symphony Orchestra, Charleston Youth Arts Company, and Children's Theatre, which create wonderful performances and allow students with an interest in the arts to have a place to grow artistically. Facilities such as Quantum Sports and Football Factory offer indoor soccer as individual and team training in many other sports. The great programs and facilities at the YMCA are an asset to our community. I think all of these programs are important and imperative to many students in our city. There could be improvements to some of the programs on pick up times for working families and work on transportation opportunities to increase participation. Additionally, the city should work on



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finding better methods of communication with our families, schools, and community to better announce and promote all of the existing events and programs already being offered.

6. Please provide anything else you'd like us to know about why you are running for Charleston city council.

There has been exciting progress in our city in the past few years; but there are some challenging issues we face in the future. I get excited at the possibilities we have ahead of us. I would love to be a part of the process of keeping our city growing and moving forward. Charleston should be a growing city that our citizens, and, more importantly, our children, are proud of. Charleston needs to be a place where we want to stay and contribute to its continued growth. Being a part of this and having an active voice in the process is why I am running for Charleston City Council.