## City Pulse 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward candidate questionnaire 2013 Tina Houghton

1. How would you describe relations between the administration and City Council? When can you do to improve it?

Poor. I do my best to work with the administration and other council members. I have an open door policy. While I have had my differences with the mayor, I don't showcase them in a public forum. Unfortunately, I believe there are certain members of council that put politics above progress. They would rather squabble to gain the spotlight. That mentality must change before relations can improve.

2. What can the city do to reduce homelessness in the city?

I believe the city does a pretty good job of caring for our homeless. Leading our efforts is HRCS Director Joan Jackson Johnson, one of the leading advocates in Michigan. She and her department organize the mobile food pantry, the financial empowerment initiative and support of shelters, including the family Center on South Cedar. There are multiple factors that influence homelessness. The primary one is overall economic condition but also mental illness and addiction problems.

3. Have the various municipal unions sacrificed equally in the past four years in terms of concessions? Please be specific.

All city employees have sacrificed. I applaud our unions for making difficult decisions to help the city through these tough economic times. "Non-emergency" employees had mandatory furloughs for nearly three years. After the first public safety millage failed, the firefighters union accepted health care concessions to reduce the number of layoffs. I am happy that both police and fire are now at full strength.

4. What are your strategies for developing the South Cedar Street Corridor?

I support a Cedar Street Corridor Improvement Authority that will help improve the infrastructure and foster economic development. I also take a hands-on approach when it comes to beautifying this vital corridor. I have organized volunteer clean-ups both with neighbors and Lansing and MSU students. In addition, I have secured a Mayor's Neighborhood Grant to make improvements to the highly visible triangle right-of-way at S. Pennsylvania and Cedar intersection.

5. Do you believe there is a crime problem in the  $2^{nd}$  ward? IF so, how do you define that and what would you do to address it?

The 2<sup>nd</sup> ward is one of the safest in the city. Being a neighborhood watch coordinator, I am proud that there are well-established neighborhood watch areas within my ward and that residents take an active approach to look out for one another. Partnering with LPD has served us well in keeping crime rates low. We also have very strong neighborhood associations that foster good communication between the city and residents to aid in this endeavor.

6. Would you support moving City Council members to a per-diem system of pay where they would not get paid for missed meetings? Why or why not?

While I am proud of my strong attendance record and believe that attending Council meetings is important, I am opposed to a system such as that. "Per-diem" in this context is misleading because it only refers to work done at public meetings. The scope of our service is hardly limited meeting attendance. In reality the majority our work is done through neighborhood forums, community cleanups, research and resolving constituent concerns.

7. A recent report in the Detroit Free Press showed that property taxes are higher in Lansing than in Ann Arbor and that Lansing's property taxes are about 67% higher than in Grand Rapids. What are city residents getting for all of this taxation? Would you argue that quality of life and services here are superior to GR's and Ann Arbor?

I disagree with the premise. I believe we provide quality services for the taxes paid. The great recession has hit communities disproportionately. The taxable value of property in Lansing is half that of those cities. In addition, Lansing is host to state government buildings which are tax exempt. Also, Lansing and Ann Arbor have the same income tax rate, Grand Rapids sought and received special dispensation from the state government to increase their income taxes.

8. Would you favor requiring companies who receive tax subsidies to hire Lansing workers first? Would you introduce an ordinance to that effect?

Our top priority for economic development is attracting new businesses to Lansing without creating unnecessary barriers like this ordinance would. I certainly favor encouraging subsidized business to hire Lansing workers first. However, Lansing cannot afford to be more restrictive than communities that we compete with for those jobs.

9. Do you support the legalization of marijuana proposal that will be on the General Election in Lansing in November? Why or why not?

I support marijuana decriminalization, which is what I believe is the intent of the ballot proposal. Prohibition never worked for alcohol and certainly isn't working for cannabis. The modern public understands how much criminalization is wasting taxpayer resources, as it fills overcrowded prisons with nonviolent offenders and it diverts police attention from their top

priority - violent crime. Additionally, public opinion is shifting toward addressing marijuana like alcohol, so it can be regulated and taxed.