

## 7<sup>th</sup> Ward Aldermanic and City Comptroller candidates speak at forum

7<sup>th</sup> Ward Aldermanic candidates Cedric Redmon and incumbent Alisha Sonnier, and City Comptroller candidates Donna Baringer and incumbent Darlene Green, spoke Wednesday evening during a joint Tower Grove East and Fox Park neighborhood associations forum at the Jefferson Avenue Mission, 2241 Jefferson Ave.

Questions, which had been submitted online, were asked by TGENA President Tristan Mackenzie and Fox Park President Sara Levin. Here's a summary of what the candidates said:

### ALDERMEN

During opening remarks, Sonnier said an alderman's most important role is presence: "It's very important that people can reach you." She said she has held over six town halls and has open office hours every month in the two years she's held office.

Redmon said he's a true grass roots candidate: "Every time I've run, I ran against the machine." He said he's seen the "ice, potholes, lack of transparency in City Hall, the disorderly situation in City Hall" and he wants to do something about it.

#### Their positions:

--Political philosophy: Sonnier said she tries to build relationships; Redmon said he would concentrate on taking care of neighborhoods.

--Police union endorsements: Redmon pointed out that he has the support of both police unions in the city. Sonnier said she has the support of every union except the police unions, which are "not one I would seek."

--Metro Greenway Extension (a 5.6-mile light rail connecting Northside, Midtown and Southside, with the last link on Jefferson to Chippewa): Sonnier said she is a strong supporter of the extension and supports the new Department of Transportation. Redmon said a robust public transit system is necessary but pointed out that neighbors along Jefferson Avenue are not happy about the extension, pointing out there have been shootings and violent crime in the Metro Link: "We need to find a way to make transportation more desirable."

--LGBTQ issues: Both said they support safety and inclusion.

--City Manager system of government: Redmon said he does not support it but Sonnier said she does.

## COMPTROLLER

The comptroller is the chief fiscal officer of the city, managing internal audits and the city's finance division. The comptroller also serves as one of three voting members – along with the mayor and aldermanic president—on the Board of Estimate and Apportionment. The board determines the city's budget and approves contracts.

During opening remarks, Baringer noted she has had plenty of experience working with the public, having served in the city's Board of Aldermen from 2007 to 2017 and in the Missouri House from 2017 to 2025. She said she has a special knack of communications to bring people together to help solve problems. She also said "I would show up for work." Green has been criticized for not coming in to work at the office.

Incumbent Green described herself as a seasoned professional who has served since 1995, when she was first appointed to the job, and then been re-elected since then. She noted the city had a triple B credit rating and only \$1.5 million in reserves when she took office; it now has a double A rating and \$151 million in reserves.

Their positions:

--Transparency and improvements: Baringer said she would hire outside auditing and modernize the comptroller's office. For instance, she would put in a centralized invoicing system. The office is supposed to have 84 employees but it only has 52, who are "overworked, overwhelmed," she said.

Green said "We have a public meeting every year for the budget process. We hear you." One time, when the city budget eliminated Neighborhood Improvement Specialists, "we added them back into the budget," she said. "I put the first \$50,000 in the budget for school crossing guards," she added.

--The role of technology in the office: Baringer said the minute she said she would run for comptroller, department heads contacted her and complained that contractors were not being paid. The department heads are frustrated because "it's a very old system." Green said that when she started, there was a wait of 45 days for paying bills; now that's down to an average of five days.

--Changing landscape between federal and city governments, given DOGE's activities:

Baringer said that the city still has not spent down \$400 million in federal pandemic aid and she is afraid Washington will claw it back. "The comptroller needs to make a priority those funds are spent down," she said.

Green responded that "We account for it, we don't spend it." She added that the city is making sure some of the money is spent wisely.

--Economic development and tax incentives: Green said the city needs lots of development, particularly on the north side. She wants to use the market rate for

development and reduce the amount of tax incentives. Baringer said the city has lots of tools in its box, including tax incentives, and the use of them is negotiable.

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