

## **CNY Vision Candidate Questionnaire**

Howie Hawkins answers:

### **What has prepared you to run for and become a city councilor?**

I have been a community organizer since the late 1960s who has helped many movements win demands, from ending the war in Vietnam and ending US investments in apartheid South Africa to getting Living Wages and Public Power on to the agenda in the city of Syracuse. I have done a lot by pushing from the outside as an activist and candidate in past campaigns for Common Council and Mayor. I can do even more by pushing from the inside as a Councilor.

### **Voter apathy is reported to be quite rampant in the African American community; true or false? And what is your party doing about it.**

The lower voter turnout in the African American community (except for last year's turnout for Obama) is due more to alienation and disgust at broken promises by the established major parties than to apathy in most cases.

The Green Party works to increase voter participation, as well as activism on the issues between elections, in several ways.

Green Party maintains its city headquarters in the heart of the South Side African American community at 2617 S. Salina St, 474-7055. We encourage and welcome community groups to use the space for their own meetings as well as to participate in Green Party activities at the office. For example, the South Side Community Coalition's Grocery Store Project has been holding its Store for a Day in the Green Party headquarters when the weather does not permit an outdoor stand.

The Green Party registers voters year round and makes a special effort to inform ex-offenders, who are often wrongly told they can never vote again, of their right to get registered and vote.

The Green Party is active on the issues of concern to the African American community, including fighting against bank, housing, and job discrimination and for living wage jobs, full funding for schools and youth programs, and public power for affordable energy.

### **What do you bring to the table that will convince or influence community residents to vote for you? In other words, what are some of the major achievements you have made that have directly benefited the African American community?**

Two achievements: putting Living Wages and Public Power on the city agenda.

I was the first candidate in Syracuse in council race in 1994 to call for a Living Wage Ordinance requiring the city and its contractors to pay a living wage on which a worker

can support a family. It took until 2005 to get a Living Wage Ordinance passed. But the Mayor undermined its implementation, with the silent complicity of the Common Council. If elected to the Council, I will fight to enforce and expand the coverage of the Living Wage Ordinance.

As the Green Party candidate for Mayor in 2005, I got widespread support for my call for public power, a city-owned electric and gas utility to replace National Grid, like the village of Solvay has where electric rates are one-fourth of rates in Syracuse. By 2008, as we continued to campaign for it through the Public Power Coalition, we got the Common Council to appropriate \$150,000 for a feasibility study of public power. Unfortunately, the Mayor has directed the firm doing the study to focus on green energy generation options without municipal ownership. Green energy is good, but without municipal ownership of the generation and distribution systems, we will not cut our energy costs. Again, the Common Council has been silent while the study they authorized has been sidetracked. If elected to the Council, I will fight to insure the money is used for the purpose it was intended, namely, to study the feasibility of replacing high-cost National Grid with a low-cost public power utility.

**What kind of solution or suggestions do you have that will help to create more jobs in the city and end up providing employment opportunities for city residents?**

To improve employment opportunities, we need to establish a Community Hiring Hall. To create new jobs, we need to establish a Municipal Development Bank.

The Community Hiring Hall would ensure that city residents, and ethnic minorities like African Americans, get their fair share of jobs with the city and its contractors. The Community Hiring Hall would be part of an improved Living Wage Ordinance. It would require city departments and city contractors to meet employment goals for city residents and ethnic minorities by hiring qualified people from the Community Hiring Hall if they cannot meet the goals from their own labor sources. The Community Hiring Hall would help city residents to qualify, get into, and stay in training programs and jobs with the city, its contractors, and other employers.

The Municipal Development Bank would be a city-owned bank with two departments: (1) A consumer loan department to provide home mortgage and improvement and other consumer loans to neighborhoods that have been redlined and discriminated against for decades, and (2) A business development department to help plan, finance, and advise new community-owned businesses.

By community-owned business I mean owner-operated small businesses, worker and consumer cooperatives, and community corporations where voting shares are restricted to residents, like the Green Bay Packers. Although the municipal bank would consider proposals from any business looking to startup or expand in the city, it would prioritize various forms of community-owned businesses in order to create wealth that is anchored to and grows in our community by the businesses' community ownership structures.

To develop a new community-owned business, the planners in the development department would draw up a business plan, arrange the financing, hire the staff and train them to operate the business, and advise it as it got up and running. When the workers could manage it on their own, they would repay the financing for the assets of the business to the bank and own it as owner-operated proprietorship if it was small, or as worker or consumer cooperative, or as a community corporation if it was larger.

The municipal bank could start with helping bring back needed retail businesses to downtown and neighborhood business districts. For example, a network of neighborhood co-op groceries downtown and in the neighborhoods is an obvious need. Another is helping aspiring small contractors in the city in construction and maintenance develop the capacity to run businesses that can bid on city and other sizeable contracts. The bank should also develop the capacity to help in the high tech, green tech, and manufacturing areas.

**How high on your priority is the problem of youth violence? What ideas or suggestions or plans do you have to help curb or stop youth violence?**

Reducing youth violence has to be a high priority. We know that youth violence goes down when school achievement and good jobs go up. All policing can do is catch the perpetrators after the crime has been done. So it is cheaper to prevent violence with expanded youth opportunities up front than to incarcerate offenders at the back end.

That means the city budget should put a high priority on school funding, youth recreation programs, and job training and placement through the Community Hiring Hall that I propose. The schools, parks, and community centers should be open and staffed nights, weekends, and summers so younger children have a safe, educational place to play and learn when parents are working. The young adults in the community should have the right to a job at a living wage. The city can make sure they have an equal opportunity to get what jobs are available through the Community Hiring Hall. And the city should demand of our federal representatives that they finally fulfill the demand of Martin Luther King's 1968 Poor People's Campaign: the right to a job at a living wage, with the government as the employer of last resort when there are not enough private jobs to go around.

**Do you understand everything about the DESTINY PROJECT to the extent where you can say that it will or will not benefit our community, especially our African American community, and whether it should be pursued further?**

The Destiny Project misused the African American community with highly publicized \$60,000 a year jobs for showcase black employees, most of whom were dropped when no longer needed for show.

We should have known. This is the same developer who for eight years after the mall opened would not allow Buffalo city buses from the inner city stop at its suburban mall, while charter busses of affluent shoppers from Canada routinely stopped at the mall.

Black inner city workers who commuted by bus at the mall had to run across a 7-lane freeway with no sidewalks. The policy only changed in 1996 when 17-year-old Cynthia Wiggins, a single mom from inner city Buffalo, was killed running across that freeway to her job at the mall.

The phoney Destiny for-show jobs notwithstanding, almost all the jobs with tenants at the Destiny mall in retail, hospitality, and maintenance were going to be low-wage, no-benefits, part-time, and dead-end. The city should not give the Carousel Mall 45 years of no property taxes in order to subsidize the creation of such bad jobs. This subsidy for Carousel also accelerates the decline of our neighborhood business districts as customers shift to the competing, subsidized mall. City economic incentives should be targeted for good jobs in manufacturing, construction, and green technology.

The Destiny/Carousel expansion should sink or swim on its own with no more taxpayer subsidies. If it sinks and no private firm will buy, complete, and operate the expanded mall, the city should commission a public plan to retrofit it into a mixed-use, mixed-income development, with public access to a recreationally oriented lakeshore park. The inner harbor should be developed as a mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood that can model a green, sustainable neighborhood for the rest of the city, as originally envisioned in the Andres Duany plan still on display at the inner harbor.