

# Washington Square Citizens League

## The Race for Mayor

Discussion Forum

**7:00-8:30 pm, Monday, March 27, 2023**

David Kurkowski, Moderator

### Introduction

The May 16 primary will soon be upon us and voters will decide who will lead the city for the next 4 years. We will elect a new mayor, city council, commissioner, controller, register of wills, and sheriff. Making an informed choice is difficult because of the plethora of candidates.

Thirteen candidates have filed the minimum 1000 signatures to appear on the ballot for mayor: 12 Democrats and one Republican. The sole Republican on the ballot for mayor is former Councilmember David Oh, who is the presumptive Republican candidate on the November Ballot. Excluded from discussion is Delscia Gray, about whom nothing is known.

Who's running? (11 Democratic candidates listed in reverse alphabetical order)

Candidate*	Experience
John Wood	Policeman
Maria Quiñones Sanchez	City Council
Rebecca Rhynhart	City Controller
Cherelle Parker	City Council
Helen Gym	City Council
Derek Green	City Council
Allan Domb	City Council
James DeLeon	Judge
Jeff Brown	Grocer
Amen Brown	State representative
Warren Bloom	Pastor

### Sources

For more information, this link contains a summary of each candidate's background positions:

<https://thephiladelphiacitizen.org/philly-mayors-race-2023/>

In addition, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* runs articles of mayoral candidates on a daily basis. WHY? also covers the race for mayor.

## **Resign to Run**

The Philadelphia Home Rule Charter’s “resign to run” rule requires city employees to step down from their posts if they wish to seek elected office, with the exception of officials who are seeking reelection.

## **Philly’s mayor: CEO of the City of Philadelphia**

By Henry Savage, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 16, 2023

*The mayor sets the tone, hires department heads, drafts the city budget and keeps the ship on course.*

Like a chief executive officer of a corporation, a mayor is the CEO of a city. And as Philly’s about to elect its next one, it’s a good idea to have a sense of what you’re voting for.

They’re the person that develops strategies to be implemented city-wide, delegates and appoints leadership positions to critical departments and manages the overall operations of a company — or in this case, Philadelphia.

According to the current Philadelphia mayor, Jim Kenney, the position isn’t a top-down authority but making changes through consensus among city leadership and the public.

“City council is the mayor’s board of directors,” Kenney said. “As I’ve served on boards of directors before, you need the board’s go-ahead in order to move forward with programs your company (or in this case a city) wants to implement. You’re also responsible for hiring the department heads that run each operating department, and you work with your cabinet to coordinate that as best you can.”

It’s a tall order with around 26,000 employees and a five billion dollar-plus budget to oversee, but with the right leadership, it is manageable, said the current mayor.

### **What are the Mayor’s primary functions?**

- Developing strategies for the city
- Tracking the performance of city strategies and making changes when needed
- Collaborating and fostering relationships with other elected officials to make sure city leaders are working together toward the same goal
- Drafting the city’s overall budget (which is then amended and approved by City Council)
- Signing City Council bills into law or vetoing bills from becoming law
- Hiring executive leadership for the several dozen city agencies

Lauren Cristella, the interim president and chief operating officer for the nonpartisan nonprofit election watchdog organization [Committee of Seventy](#), said the mayor’s job is so impactful to the life of Philadelphians because their strategy trickles down into all departments in the city.

“The hiring is probably the first and most important job of any new mayor,” said Cristella.

“Everything from the managing director, city representative and the police chief and fire commissioner. All of those executive department heads, and there are tons of them throughout the city, cover almost every facet of life — that’s all in the mayor’s purview.”

The leaders hired for these city departments implement the mayor's strategy in a variety of ways, like [proposing roadway solutions like the Washington Avenue Repavement and Improvement project](#) or [implementing a tax on sugary drinks to fund free Pre-K and improvements to parks and playgrounds](#). In the case of the Washington Ave. improvement project, those proposals come from leadership in the Office of Transportation, Infrastructure and Sustainability. In contrast, proposals like Philly's soda tax came directly down from Mayor Kenney. Either way, the strategies and leadership the mayor employs shape the way our city looks.

"You need to hire people that are smarter than you," said Kenney about delegating leadership. "Then you need to listen to their points of view and come to some mutual group decision that you're all now responsible for."

### **What are the requirements to become Mayor?**

A candidate must be at least 25 years old, a citizen of the U.S. and at least a three-year resident of Philadelphia.

### **How long is a mayoral term?**

Once elected, the Mayor has a term of four years and can only serve for two consecutive terms at a time. For example, after this mayoral term ends, Mayor Kenney can't run again for Mayor for a third term. However, he could run again after the next Mayor finishes their first term. According to the city's [Home Rule Charter](#), the two-term limit is consecutive, not lifetime.

### **How much does the Mayor get paid?**

The current mayor makes \$240,000 per year, according to the Committee of Seventy.

### **Can you contact the mayor?**

Yes. To contact the [mayor's office](#) you can call (215) 686-2181, [fill out the online contact form](#) or visit City Hall Office 215 at 1400 JFK. Blvd.

### **Can mayors be fired or quit their job?**

In Pennsylvania, [local governments cannot vote to remove an elected official, nor can the public petition to recall an elected official](#). However, elected officials themselves can resign.

If the mayor resigns, [a special election would be called to fill the vacancy, or if it's the last year of a mayor's term, City Council will vote in a new mayor to finish the term](#). In the time between the mayor's resignation and the appointment of a new mayor after a special election or City Council vote, the City Council President would become interim mayor.

Philadelphians themselves can't recall the mayor. While the city's [Home Rule Charter has a provision explicitly outlined for the public to gather enough signatures and request the mayor to resign](#) or face a recall election — [it's not enforced due to a Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling](#) that rules the provision unconstitutional.

There's potentially another way, which involves the state legislature impeaching a local elected official — as seen most recently with the Pennsylvania House of Representatives' [failed attempt](#)

to impeach Philly District Attorney Larry Krasner — however, impeachment of a Philly politician by the state legislature is very rare and has never been successful.

Philly's current and soon-to-be former mayor, Jim Kenney, is in his final term. Since becoming mayor in 2016, his main priority has been public education, [making Philadelphia the first big U.S. city to implement a soda tax](#), which funds the city's free Pre-K program that serves more than [3,000 children in the city](#) and funds improvements to parks through [a multi-million-dollar program called Rebuild](#).

Where Kenney may have fallen short, [and by his own admission](#), is the administration's choice to have a young start-up operate the city's first COVID-19 rollout, [which ended in a scandal](#). However, [76% of Philadelphians were fully vaccinated](#) by the following year.

Additionally, his tenure has been marked with record gun violence [as the city's number of shootings has reached record levels in the past three years](#). However, the fault of gun violence doesn't fall on one person in government, especially so in Philadelphia, [where city leadership is legally not allowed to create their own gun laws due to a legal rule called "preemption."](#)

### **What is Philly looking for in its next mayor?**

Across the city, most Philadelphians agree that the city is heading in the wrong direction, according to [The Inquirer's most recent analysis of a market research survey](#) conducted by the firm [SSRS](#). Additionally, a whopping majority of respondents said crime is their number one concern in the city. Following crime, residents are concerned about public education and the economy.

[According to the AARP's most recent poll](#), older adults in Philadelphia agree and say personal safety and security concerns are on their minds when voting for the city's 100th mayor. Adults ages 50 years and older are also worried about affordable housing, making sidewalks safer and improving the economy and job opportunities.

Philadelphia's next mayor will have to have plans to address gun violence in the city, improve public education and job creation, and find ways to make housing more affordable.

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## **Philly Mayor Jim Kenney looks back at chaotic year, maintains he won't resign**

By Tom MacDonald, *WHYY*, December 27, 022

*The Mayor said he's here until his last day mandated by the charter and believes his administration isn't getting the praise they deserve locally.*

July 4 may have been the low point of Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney's 2022.

Following a shooting that injured two Philadelphia police officers assigned to the city's Independence Day festivities, [Kenney lamented the stress his job requires](#).

"I'll be happy when I'm not mayor and I can enjoy some stuff," Kenney said during an impromptu press conference late that night.

Now with just one year left in the mayor's office, Kenney looks back on a difficult 2022.

"I took the job to finish it," he said in a year-end interview with WHYY News. "That moment of frustration at that particular time of night with that particular circumstance is an expression of frustration and anger. But it doesn't mean I don't go to work every day. It doesn't mean I don't try my best every day."

While local civic leaders denounced Kenney's comments, he pointed to positive stories published in newspapers outside the city as evidence of the good things that are going on in Philadelphia.

"We get more good press in The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and The Washington Post. We've had more positive stories in those. The [Wall Street Journal](#), it's basically a Republican conservative paper that did a total layout of the city's rebirth and the city's reinvigoration when we convinced them."

Kenney said he gets "hugs and well wishes" from people in the city and is urged to, in his words, "keep up the good work."

He admitted the city could have done better when it came to "the civil unrest and the pandemic" over the past two years, but said there "were no playbooks for them," and he couldn't call anyone for advice because "no one has ever been through this."

For the second year in a row, Philadelphia has topped 500 murders under Kenney's watch.

As the field of candidates to replace him in the mayor's office continues to grow, much of the campaign rhetoric has centered on reducing crime and violence in the city. A defensive Kenney questioned what those running for mayor would do differently.

"What are you specifically going to do to drive those numbers down that we didn't do?," Kenney asked. "I think they have to go out and show people what they're going to do and not only tell them, but explain to them how they're going to do it."

Kenney conceded the issue of crime and drugs is difficult to deal with in the city, but defended his decision not to bring in the National Guard to assist Philadelphia Police as some have suggested.

"Seriously? I mean, could you imagine trying to get out from under that over the next decade where I have people in military garb, military gear with loaded rifles, marching around neighborhoods in Philadelphia with no police, no police training, and no ability to arrest. I mean, those kinds of knee-jerk suggestions are not only wrong, it's wrong long-term."

On the positive side, Kenney pointed to the city's \$500 million budget surplus as projected by the Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority. That, coupled with efforts to support the city's pension fund, which is 60% funded, and will be 80% funded within a few years, are high points for his administration, Kenney said.

"Poverty is down three clicks, 3%, not anywhere near as much as we need to get it down. But getting poverty down 3% in a pandemic and in two recessions, I mean, that's not bad stuff," Kenney said.

As he enters his final year in office, Kenney said there is still plenty for him and his administration to do.

“Besides the gun violence issue, which is absolutely number one, I go to the other set of things we also have to do. You have to continue to fund education. We have to continue to drive down our wage and business taxes. We have to continue to be an attractor to business and retention, a retainer of businesses we got to continue to help push hospitality, tourism.”

He said with the right help, the city will be fine moving forward.

“I am very, very proud and happy to be mayor. I’m not happy with, I think, some of the problems that we have to face,” he said. He said some problems “are very daunting, and some of them are frustrating because you don’t have all the tools.”

Among those frustrations, Kenney said, is Pennsylvania state lawmakers’ refusal to give the city the ability to regulate firearms more strictly within its borders than elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

Philadelphia voters will select a new mayor in November. Kenney will remain in his post until the election winner is sworn in in January 2024.

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How are candidates financing their campaigns for mayor? Are there limits on contributions?

## **The Philly mayor’s race is a money race, from thousands of small donations to a \$5 million check**

By Sean Collins, Anna Orso, and Aseem Shukla, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Feb. 1, 2023.

*Campaign finance reports filed by eight Democratic candidates provide the clearest picture yet of who is best positioned to sustain a campaign through the May 16 primary election.*

Four [candidates running for Philadelphia mayor](#) each collected more than \$800,000 in campaign contributions last year, but one hopeful has significantly more money in the bank than any other thanks to a check he wrote to himself.

New campaign finance reports show that former City Councilmember Allan Domb, a real estate magnate known as the “condo king,” lent \$5 million to his mayoral campaign, meaning that at the start of this year, he had more money to spend on advertising, staff, and expenses than seven other candidates combined.

Campaign finance reports filed by eight candidates this week provide the clearest picture yet of who among the large field of Democrats vying for the party’s nomination is best positioned to sustain a campaign through the May 16 primary election. And the filings show who each candidate leaned on over the course of the last calendar year to finance their nascent campaigns.

Besides Domb, three other candidates — grocer Jeff Brown, former Councilmember Helen Gym, and ex-City Controller Rebecca Rhynhart — each also raised more than \$800,000. None are self-funding to the same level as Domb, but Brown, a longtime ShopRite proprietor, gave \$240,000 to his campaign, and Gym kicked in \$25,000 to her own.

State Rep. Amen Brown, who was the last of the group to declare his candidacy, brought in just \$3,500 to his mayoral campaign last year.

### **Allan Domb invested in himself**

In addition to Domb's \$5 million loan, he raised more than \$700,000 in other contributions, and his campaign spent more than \$1 million last year, allowing him to be one of the first candidates to air TV commercials. He entered 2023 with just over \$5 million in the bank.

"Allan is also choosing to put his own money into this race, because he believes it's critical that Philadelphians have a mayor who will provide the leadership needed to tackle the public safety crisis and create more opportunity in all neighborhoods," Domb spokesperson Jared Leopold said. "Allan will never be beholden to special interests, unlike other candidates who are coordinating with SuperPACs to bolster their campaigns."

Domb's investment in himself [triggered the "millionaire's amendment" of Philly's campaign finance rules](#), which allows all candidates in a race to collect donations worth up to double the usual cap if any candidate gives \$250,000 or more to their campaign. That means all candidates can now take in contributions of up to \$6,200 per year from individuals and \$25,200 per year from political committees.

Domb waited until Dec. 30 to write himself the big check, which prevented his rivals from taking advantage of the increased donation limits last year.

### **Gym, Rhynhart have the most money in the bank**

Besides Domb, Gym and Rhynhart reported having the most money in the bank, with Gym ending the year with about \$1,031,000 and Rhynhart with \$1,026,000.

Among Gym's donors, one stuck out: the American Federation of Teachers' political arm, which donated more than \$112,000 over the course of the year.

That's well in excess of the usual city contribution limit, which is \$12,600 annually for organizations or political committees donating to a campaign. But the donations were made before December, when Gym officially declared her candidacy. Under the city's campaign finance regulations, campaigns can accept "excess precandidacy contributions," so long as the funds are segregated in a separate account.

Those funds can't be used "to influence the outcome" of the election, according to the regulation. Shane Creamer, the executive director of the Board of Ethics, said those funds may be used to cover, for example, "exploratory" expenses.

### **Parker kept it local**

Former Councilmember Cherelle Parker appears to have raised a greater share of her campaign money from Philadelphians than any other candidate, according to an Inquirer analysis of contributions reported this week.

Campaign finance filings only itemize contributions from donors who gave more than \$50 during one year. About 68% of Parker's contributions that were above that amount came from within the city limits, and only about 8% came from outside of Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Overall, Parker raised \$547,000 last year, and had \$460,000 in cash on hand at the start of 2023.

By contrast, only 35% of the donations listed in Jeff Brown’s report came from Philly, the lowest share of any of the candidates, according to the analysis, which excluded money the candidates donated to themselves. Brown raised a total of \$847,000, excluding his own contribution.

Derek Green, a former Council member who developed political ties across the country through his involvement in groups like the National League of Cities, took only 41% of his itemized contributions from the city, the second-lowest share in the field. Green raised a total of \$484,000 last year, and had \$440,000 on hand to start 2023.

### **Rhyhart’s campaign paid a prominent endorser**

Rhyhart spent a significant chunk of cash: a half a million dollars, which was largely used on office space, payroll, and polling.

Her campaign also shelled out to a handful of consultants, including one former mayor: John F. Street, who received a \$22,000 payment from the campaign in November. And notably, [Street endorsed Rhyhart](#) during a news conference last month.

Rhyhart’s campaign said in a statement that Street is a senior adviser who works in the campaign office daily and is “compensated like any other consultant, advisor or staff member.”

### **Jeff Brown spending early on TV**

Domb and Jeff Brown are the only candidates [who have run television ads thus far](#).

But Domb spent more than \$1 million in total and has plenty to spare, while Brown burned through more than half of his cash, spending in excess of \$600,000 during the reporting period. Of that, more than \$350,000 was spent on advertising and media production.

Brown raised more than \$1 million in total during 2022. Other notable donors besides Brown include Bart Blatstein, a real estate developer, and Harold Honickman, who — alongside Brown — [was one of the chief opponents](#) of Philadelphia’s sweetened-beverage tax.

### **Quiñones Sánchez in the mix**

As a longtime representative of some of the poorest neighborhoods in the city and a frequent foe of the Democratic establishment, former Councilmember Maria Quiñones Sánchez knew that one of her biggest challenges in the mayor’s race would be fund-raising.

So she entered the race early and got to hitting up donors, allowing her to enter 2023 with a respectable \$502,000 in the bank, an amount she hopes will eliminate any questions about her viability.

But it also leaves her behind the ball compared with candidates who have already spent significant amounts on advertising to boost their profiles.

## **Philly has had 99 mayors. Could we elect the first woman this year?**

By Julia Terruso and Anna Orso, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 15, 2023.

*Of the top 10 largest U.S. cities, only Philadelphia and New York have never had a female mayor. 2023 could be the year that changes for Philly. Some prominent female politicians argue it should be.*

Philadelphia has long been a city of historical firsts, but when it comes to electing a woman to run the place, it could be one of the last.

Of its 99 mayors dating back to 1691, Philadelphia has never elected a woman. It's joined only by New York on the list of big U.S. cities never to have a female executive. Four women are running [in a crowded race this year](#): former Councilmembers Helen Gym, Cherelle Parker, and Maria Quiñones Sánchez, and former Controller Rebecca Rhynhart.

2023 *could* be the year of the woman. Some prominent female politicians argue it *should* be.

"It's never happened, and then suddenly it happens," said former U.S. Rep. Allyson Schwartz, a Democrat who represented Montgomery County and part of Philly. "You always look to the next election ... but it's been tough in Philadelphia and given we've had so many women on City Council, it's a good question. Why's it taking so long?"

Women are an extremely important slice of the Democratic coalition and in such a Democratic city, it's somewhat surprising, Schwartz said. The first woman to lead a big city was Bertha Knight Landes, who was elected mayor of Seattle in 1926.

In Philadelphia, not many women have run for mayor. Happy Fernandez was the first to seek a major-party nomination — in 1999.

"It is way past time that qualified women step up," she said 24 years ago at a City Hall news conference announcing her bid.

She came in a distant fourth in a crowded Democratic primary.

Former District Attorney Lynne Abraham ran in 2015 — the first woman with elected executive leadership experience to launch a bid. But [her opponents had deep-pocketed backers](#), and her tough-on-crime background didn't match the leftward-leaning moment. She finished third in the Democratic primary.

Other women from both parties have also fallen short: Terry Gillen, the former head of the Redevelopment Authority, entered the race in 2015 but dropped out. Republicans nominated Daphne Goggins in 2019 and Melissa Murray Bailey in 2015 — but with the party registration disadvantage at 7-1, they entered a largely losing battle.

No Democratic woman has won her party's nomination in the city.

"It's very discouraging to me," said Judee von Seldeneck, founder and chair of Diversified Search Group, a senior-level executive talent agency in Philadelphia..

Von Seldeneck worked on Fernandez's campaign in 1999 and has since worked to elect Democratic women in the state.

“This is such a great city, and I think we pride ourselves in being so open minded and about equal opportunity for all,” she said, “but when you look at it, the facts don’t always bear that out, and this is a good example of that.”

### **Recent progress in representation**

Statewide, Pennsylvania lagged behind other states in gender representation but has recently elected more women to Congress [and to the statehouse](#). Five of the state’s 17 U.S. House members are now women, up from zero as recently as 2018.

The state has still never had a woman as governor or U.S. senator. (Both positions have been held entirely by white men.)

And while a woman has never been the city’s mayor, Philadelphia’s political class has seen its fair share of trailblazers, especially in the legislative branch.

In 1952, after the Philadelphia Home Rule charter was adopted and established the city’s current form of governance, one woman — Constance H. Dallas — sat on Council. More than four decades later, Anna Verna became Philadelphia’s first (and only) female Council president, and [she held the position for 12 years](#). Today, women make up nearly 40% of Council.

Former City Councilmember Cherelle Parker (left) and former City Controller Rebecca Rhynhart talk before a mayoral candidates forum in January. Both are running for Philadelphia mayor. Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer

Other firsts have been more recent.

Quiñones Sánchez was the first Latina elected to the 17-person Council in 2007. Nearly a decade later, Gym became the first Asian American woman to sit on Council. Either would break both gender and racial barriers if elected mayor. In 2018, Rhynhart [was sworn in as the city’s first female controller](#), and in 2019, Rochelle Bilal was the first woman elected sheriff.

Other major cities have elected their first female mayor only recently. Last year, Karen Bass [became the first woman](#) to lead Los Angeles, and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot is the first Black woman to hold the office there. With their elections, and Kate Gallego serving as mayor of Phoenix, half of the six largest U.S. cities have women at the helm.

In Boston, Michelle Wu in 2021 [became the first woman elected](#) mayor in that city, which had only ever elected white men.

The election of Wu — a progressive who bested three other women and two men — in some ways showed how Boston had evolved, said Mary Lou Akai-Ferguson, who managed Wu’s campaign.

But Akai-Ferguson said that throughout the campaign, she felt some still held on to old notions of “legitimacy,” saying the men — who were polling at the bottom and finished in the single digits — still received significant media attention.

“I know that wouldn’t have happened if they were women,” she said.

## **‘Say it out loud’**

While some Philadelphians aren’t shy about saying they think it’s time a woman won, [the candidates themselves have referenced — but not centered](#) — their campaigns around their history-making potential. They have, however, made their personal stories as moms in politics part of their argument for the experience they would bring to the office.

“I haven’t heard any of them directly say, ‘It’s time for a woman,’” Schwartz said of the candidates. “I’ll say it for them: It’s time for a woman.”

Schwartz, who ran for governor in 2014, said she understands the tightrope female candidates often find themselves on — balancing running a campaign with the added weight of history and representation.

“You want to be taken seriously as who you are, and that includes being a woman,” Schwartz said. “And you know how important it is to run and see more women running — but you also have to start out by really presenting yourself for your credentials.”

Von Seldeneck, who supports Quiñones Sánchez, [wrote an op-ed](#) in the Philadelphia Citizen encouraging voters to support one of the female candidates. All four women are highly qualified, she argued, so why not pick among them?

“I think it should be raised more as an issue,” she said. “It’s time for a woman mayor. People should say it out loud.”

Von Seldeneck lamented the role that money plays in politics and [the early fund-raising lead](#) self-funders Jeff Brown and former Councilmember Allan Domb have in the race.

“At the end of the day, it gets down to raising money, which is always an extra-hard challenge for women,” she said. “That’s a huge factor.”

Some research has shown that donors [give more to male candidates than similarly situated female candidates](#). Men also tend to give more money than women do, though that has shifted in recent years with fund-raising groups like EMILY’s List and smaller female-focused political action committees.

Former City Councilmember Blondell Reynolds Brown thinks younger voters getting involved in politics may help a woman in the race this year. She looks at how her 26-year-old daughter has become more interested in politics since progressive women like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez (D., N.Y.) entered the political stage.

Reynolds Brown also thinks traditional gatekeepers — labor unions, political parties, and donors — are more supportive of women than in the past. Still, there are always coded language and questions about qualifications that women get more often than male candidates do.

“Sexism doesn’t disappear simply because you decide you got the right stuff to get in the ring,” she said.

Three of the candidates in the race — Parker, Quiñones Sánchez, and Derek Green — worked for former Councilmember Marian Tasco. Tasco is backing Parker in the race and said she doesn't hear too much emphasis on gender, which she thinks is a good thing.

"We're moving, I believe, away from male or female," Tasco said. "It's who is the best person to run the government and the strongest and the one who could get things done and work with people and make a difference."

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## **Philly mayoral candidates for the first time debated crime, policing, and stop-and-frisk. Here are 4 big takeaways.**

By Anna Orso, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 19, 2023

*Nine Democrats running for mayor appeared on stage at a forum on how to prevent gun violence in Philadelphia.*

Philadelphia mayoral candidates for the first time debated what all of them say is the No. 1 issue facing the city: gun violence and public safety.

Some said the city needs to expand mental health supports and strengthen outreach to young people. A few said they wouldn't retain the leadership of the police department. And all — except one — said they oppose stop-and-frisk.

Nine Democrats running ahead of the May primary election appeared on stage Thursday night at a forum hosted by two City Council members at St. Joseph's University. The event, the second major forum of the primary cycle, was intended to probe the candidates' positions on how to prevent gun violence.

The rate of shootings in the city skyrocketed in 2020 and drove [an unprecedented number of homicides](#) over the past three years. Voters and residents will expect the next mayor to steer the city out of the crisis, and Democrats running for the nomination [will try to strike a balance between controlling the urgent problem](#) and addressing societal factors that drive it.

Here are four of our biggest takeaways from the two-hour forum:

### **No candidate, including Gym, wants to defund police**

Every former Council member on the stage — Helen Gym, Cherelle Parker, Allan Domb, Derek Green, and Maria Quiñones Sánchez — voted in 2020 to cancel a proposed increase to the police budget amid mass racial justice protests that came in wake of the murder of George Floyd.

But it's Gym, the most progressive candidate, whom rivals have tried to tie to the movement to reduce police funding and divert it to other services. Gym has been critical of the police department, and in 2020 [tweeted that a Minneapolis plan](#) to dismantle its force showed "how transformative change can happen."

She said Thursday she wanted "to set the record straight about police funding."

“Now is the time to stabilize police funding. It is not the time to cut,” Gym said. “A tough-on-crime public safety initiative also includes all the things: housing, mental health supports, education, jobs, and infrastructure that literally prevents crime. These investments should be in addition to policing and not in lieu of them.”

Several candidates said they’d reexamine how the police department spends [its nearly \\$800 million budget](#). Former City Controller Rebecca Rhynhart said she’d prioritize “civilianizing” the department, or [moving more officers from administrative work to patrol](#). Quiñones Sánchez said she’d study bloated police overtime usage.

And ShopRite proprietor Jeff Brown, who has said police officers feel unsupported by political figures, said he would oppose increasing funding to the department.

“We have enough money in the police budget,” he said. “I’m not for cutting it, but ... this city is so poorly managed, and the police are included in it.”

### **Parker flirts with stop-and-frisk**

During a rapid-fire round where candidates were supposed to answer questions with a “yes” or “no,” the contenders were asked if they support stop-and-frisk.

Every candidate said no — except Parker. She briefly paused, then said: “The constitutional use of stop-and-frisk is a tool law enforcement needs to protect and serve us.”

It’s not the first time [she’s embraced a mixed stance on the controversial police tactic](#), in which officers stop and sometimes search pedestrians over suspicious behavior. The practice has long been considered racially biased, and stops were often performed without legal justification.

In July, Parker stood alongside Council President Darrell L. Clarke as he called for the city to revisit the practice. In 2020, she [championed symbolic legislation to add language to the City Charter banning unconstitutional stops and frisks](#).

### **More questions than answers on clearance rates**

Candidates were asked how to improve police clearance rates, or the percentage of cases that are considered solved. The Police Department’s clearance rates — 23% for shootings and 47% for homicides — are below goals the department set for itself.

There were few concrete plans to bolster investigations.

Rhynhart, Parker, and Brown each said the city’s forensics unit is in a state of disrepair and needs more support. None mentioned that the department is already set to receive [a \\$50 million cash infusion](#) from the state to support improved forensic and digital policing systems.

Green said he’d prioritize better collaboration between police and the District Attorney’s Office. Domb said his police department would “focus on a small amount of people” committing a plurality of crime in the city. Gym said the city needs to “re-center” on young people and provide stronger resources to children.

### **An awkward question on Commissioner Outlaw**

During the rapid-fire section, candidates were asked to answer yes or no: Would they retain Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw?

Jeff Brown responded, “That’s loaded,” briefly paused, and then said, “I can’t guarantee that. No.”

Domb, Gym, and retired Judge James DeLeon said yes. Green and Warren Bloom Sr. said no.

Then it went a little off the rails. Parker said “no personnel decisions on the campaign trail.”

Then Rhyhart and Quiñones Sánchez followed, also refusing to answer yes or no.

“This is about policy,” Rhyhart said.

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## **Will Philly’s next mayor fund arts and culture?**

By Alaina Hohns, *Broad Street Review*, March 3, 2023

### **The number-one issue?**

Many of the candidates prioritized gun violence and public safety in their opening statements and throughout the evening. [Cherelle Parker](#) said that the benefit of our arts and culture economy “does not flow if our city is not safe.” [Derek Green](#) called violence Philly’s number-one issue, and said that people feel frightened to come to venues like the Kimmel. [David Oh](#) and [Allan Domb](#) also repeatedly emphasized the need for safety in public spaces.

But the arts aren’t just something we can plug in once we get gun violence under control. Fortunately, many candidates noted the importance of arts in violence prevention. Parker touted the “problem-solving power” of the arts. [Jeff Brown](#) noted that arts involvement is an important career-training option, and Green added that arts exposure builds creativity and an entrepreneurial drive. And Parker, more than any other candidate, demonstrated how exposure to the arts as a youngster, particularly Black women’s literature, made her into the person she is today: “You can’t be what you can’t see.”

Candidates also discussed the role of the arts in healing from violence, with [Maria Quiñones-Sánchez](#), [Rebecca Rhyhart](#), and Oh all mentioning the value of arts in overcoming trauma. Green said that violence, homelessness, and hunger are “dehumanizing,” but that the arts can help reverse that damage.

### **Plans for arts funding**

Candidates initially seemed confused and hesitant when moderators asked them to raise their hands if they would advocate a dedicated funding stream for the arts—Philly is behind many other major cities on this. Quiñones-Sánchez immediately wanted to clarify the method of funding.

They all got a chance to elaborate. Oh promised to create a \$40 million “Arts Recovery Fund,” and said that arts funding should target for-profit institutions as well as non-profits. Green emphasized his past fight against Philadelphia Cultural Fund cuts (*BSR* is a PCF recipient) and suggested the amusement tax as a likely source for arts funding.

“I pledge to be the arts mayor,” [Helen Gym](#) said, suggesting an expansion of the hotel tax to support the arts. Domb promised to channel Ed Rendell, calling the arts “a huge engine for the city” and celebrating the sector as a great return on investment, with an annual impact topping

\$3 billion, including associated hospitality and restaurant spending, plus thousands of jobs. [James DeLeon](#) suggested updated towing regulations as a source for arts funding.

Brown promised to install a “huge force of grant-writers,” and Rhynhart called the arts “a human necessity” that we must “prioritize” in the budget, instead of scraping up funds year by year. Green insisted he’d make the Office of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy (OACCE, which Mayor Kenney [tried to eliminate](#) in his 2021 budget proposal) a permanent entity, and Domb promised to support the arts through the city’s general fund.

Each candidate promised to bring OACCE into the cabinet. Rhynhart quickly promised a deputy mayor for arts and culture; Brown guaranteed a “deputy mayor of arts, culture, and fun.”

What qualities will candidates look for when hiring an OACCE leader? Green wants “someone who does not believe in silos.” Gym added they must bring “joy” to the job. DeLeon intoned that they should “not be a backstabber.” Domb said he wants to work 18-hour days to fill his own arts deputy role.

### **Ready for a crowd?**

The moderators also pressed candidates on their plans for 2026, which will see the MLB All-Star Game, the World Cup, and the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, projected to draw hundreds of thousands of tourists.

Green promised to tap into a nationwide network of mayors to prep. Domb said he’d reach out to past mayors who have already handled major events, like the papal visit. DeLeon promised funding to the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors’ Bureau for an international ad campaign. Rhynhart and Brown promised to be Philly’s “cheerleader.”

Parker suggested additional neighborhood police presence. Oh called for SEPTA upgrades. Quiñones-Sánchez said we need to draw these visitors into city neighborhoods they wouldn’t otherwise visit, and Gym said that all of Philly’s own population should also be able to enjoy these celebrations.

### **Art in education**

On the topic of art education, many candidates pointed to ongoing rampant inequity in Philly schools. Gym called arts education her “passion.” Parker called for “educational opportunities” year-round because we’re not a society of farmers anymore; Oh pushed investment in libraries. Quiñones-Sánchez said youngsters need to see art in a broader community context, and we can fight inequity at school by bringing all students to experience major Philly arts venues, which Domb touted as well, alongside the arts’ role in improving grades and attendance, and reducing drop-out rates. Brown promised to make the arts mandatory in K-12. Rhynhart said she’ll pursue more private and foundation funding for art programs in schools.

### **Missed opportunities**

Questions on councilmanic prerogative, the wage tax, and a proposed subway line on the Roosevelt Boulevard corridor (especially with only 15 seconds to respond) felt strange for an arts forum. Land use, tax policy, and transit are important topics that deserve their own sessions.

This time at the Kimmel could have been better spent spotlighting disability access as a cultural issue—despite every third word of the debate being “diversity” or “equity,” disability wasn’t mentioned once, beyond Brown’s worry about “handicapped” people losing their homes to high real-estate taxes, and nods to trauma and mental health.

Rhynhart mentioned Philly’s immigrant community as a point of pride, but otherwise, there was very little dialogue about this aspect of our city. A more consistently culture-focused debate also could have asked if or how the candidates will fight a burgeoning national wave of educational fearmongering and censorship, including bans on books and entire fields of study about race, gender, and LGBTQ stories—a worthy inquiry in a region famously packed with universities.

But there’s only so much you can cover with nine would-be mayors in 90 minutes, and this tightly moderated debate saw each candidate fighting to prove that arts and culture will be an important part of their platform. We’ll certainly be watching.

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## City Council on the ballot

All 17 seats on City Council are up for election—10 district seats and 7 at-large. In our own district—District 1—Incumbent Mark Squilla is running opposed and his re-election to a third term is certain. Of the seven at-large seats, two are reserved for the minority party (Democrats have a 7-1 registration advantage in Philadelphia). Democratic voters will choose up to 5 of 29 candidates for at-large seats. Republicans will choose up to 5 of 6 candidates, but only the top two will appear on the November ballot.

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## Darrell L. Clarke’s retirement ends four decades of Philadelphia City Council leadership. Here’s why it matters and what happens next.

by [Anna Orso](#), [Sean Collins Walsh](#), and [Chris Brennan](#), The Philadelphia Inquirer, Feb. 23, 2023

Philadelphia City Council President Darrell L. Clarke announced Thursday [he does not intend to seek reelection](#), setting off a massive shift in city leadership that could impact residents for years to come.

Clarke will be replaced as president in January when the next Council is sworn in — [the same time that a new mayor will take office](#).

Here’s what you need to know about what this means for Philadelphians and what could happen next.

### Why does Clarke’s departure matter?

The Council president is one of the most powerful political figures in Philadelphia and holds enormous sway over all sorts of policy related to taxes, housing, development, and how the city [spends billions of dollars every year](#).

Clarke has held the post for 11 years, spanning two mayoral administrations, and Council conducts business in a way reflective of [his conflict-averse leadership style](#).

While past presidents presided over Council meetings that featured members openly clashing, under Clarke, legislation was rarely brought to a vote without near unanimous support, and negotiations happened largely behind closed doors.

### **What does the Philly City Council president do?**

[The Council president's office](#), in consultation with other Council leadership, decides what legislation is considered, if it gets a hearing, and when it comes up for a vote. The Council president schedules and presides over weekly meetings, and he or she casts the final vote on bills.

In addition, the Council president appoints members to a variety of standing committees, where hearings are held and details of legislation are hammered out. Members who maintain a good relationship with the Council president can be rewarded with more powerful committee assignments or chairmanships.

Clarke's salary is \$179,167 annually. The base salary for city council is \$142,751.

### **Why is this happening now?**

All 17 [Council members are up for election](#) this year, and candidates need to file nomination petitions by early March in order to get on the ballot. Feb. 14 was the first day candidates were allowed to begin circulating petitions, meaning candidates for office [need to decide if they are running](#).

### **What happens next?**

Clarke's departure will set off two simultaneous contests to replace him as a Council member and as Council president.

**First:** A handful of candidates are expected to run in the Democratic primary this May to become the next Council member representing the 5th Council District. The district includes much of North Philadelphia, Strawberry Mansion, Brewerytown, Fishtown, parts of Center City, and the area around Temple University.

**Second:** [Members of Council will start jockeying](#) to replace him as Council president. That person will almost certainly be a Council veteran, not the person elected to represent the 5th District.

### **Who could become Council president?**

Any member of Council can be elected president. But it is traditionally awarded to one of the body's 10 geographically based district Council members, not one of the seven members who represent the city at-large. And it will almost certainly be a Democrat, as the party is likely to hold at least 14 of Council's 17 members.

The Council president is always a veteran of the legislative body, of which there are only a few. Next January, at least 12 members out of 17 will have served one term or less.

All four veteran Democratic Councilmembers — **Curtis Jones Jr.**, [the current Democratic majority leader](#), **Mark Squilla**, the majority whip, as well as **Kenyatta Johnson** and **Cindy Bass** — said they're considering running to succeed Clarke.

## Who picks the next Council president?

Council’s leadership team, including the Council president, is elected by the members of City Council at the beginning of each four-year term, similar to how other legislative bodies, [like Congress](#), pick leaders. Whomever garners votes from a majority of the 17-member body will take the helm.

The race to get those nine votes will largely take place behind closed doors and could continue after new members take office in January. A leadership vote will take place soon after swearing in, as Council can’t move legislation without a Council president, leadership team, and standing committees.

## What does all this mean for the next mayor?

A Council president can make or break a mayor’s agenda by agreeing to shepherd their legislative priorities or stifling them before they reach a vote.

Mayor Jim Kenney hinted at the importance of a mayor’s relationship with the Council president recently, [saying earlier this month](#) that his key piece of advice to the next mayor is: “Be friends with the Council president.”

Kenney, a former Council member, speaks with Clarke regularly, and Clarke has generally been amenable to working with Kenney on his priorities. That stands in contrast to former Mayor Michael Nutter, who often clashed with Council during Clarke’s tenure and saw some of his policy priorities falter.

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After Bobby Henon was convicted and sentenced to 3 ½ years in prison, there was discussion—both public and in council—about the conflicts that can emerge when politicians have outside businesses and jobs. It also called for public financing of elections. To my knowledge, the bill introduced by Councilmember Maria Quiñones-Sánchez never passed.

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## No more second jobs for City Council

Editorial, Philadelphia Inquirer, November 4, 2021

*Committing to the work of public service means answering first and foremost to the voters of Philadelphia — even if that means sacrificing income and influence in the private sector.*

Regardless of what a jury decides about Philadelphia City Councilmember Bobby Henon’s future, [his bribery trial](#) may have done little to disabuse anyone of the notion that [corruption flourishes](#) in our local [corridors of power](#).

The charges against Henon center on outside employment with a local union in addition to his job on Council. Taken together, his and other high-profile cases make clear that in order to ensure public accountability and to prevent any potential conflicts of interest, it is essential that City Council prohibit its members from holding second jobs.

While it isn't illegal for City Council members to have more than one employer, that doesn't make it ethical, a position this board has long held. Three other Council members currently hold outside jobs: Councilmember Derek Green is "of counsel" at the politically influential Obermayer Rebmann Maxwell & Hoppel law firm, which describes him as a [practicing attorney](#). Councilmember Brian O'Neill is a [retired counsel](#) with Fox Rothschild, another well-connected law firm. Councilmember Allan Domb has been a well-known businessman in the city for decades. In addition, Council members David Oh and Isaiah Thomas both have ownership stakes in local small businesses.

Other Council members with outside employment may protest that none of their jobs have drawn the attention of federal prosecutors, and that a ban on holding second jobs would discourage those from outside the political sphere from even considering a run for office.

Domb, who donates his annual salary (which exceeds \$136,000), says his office has worked closely with the city's Board of Ethics to ensure that any legislation he proposes or plays a significant role in drafting meets that body's ethical standards. Domb noted that a recent proposal he authored on the regulation of streeteries would prevent some of his own establishments from serving customers outdoors. Green and O'Neill also collaborate with the ethics board to avoid conflicts.

Still, committing to the work of public service means answering first and foremost to the voters of Philadelphia — even if that means sacrificing income and influence in the private sector. And it's not as though Council members are slouches when it comes to pay. According to a 2016 study by the Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia City Council members are [among the highest paid in 15 major U.S. cities in average council salary](#), behind Washington and Los Angeles. In New York City, where council members face the additional constraint of term limits, a ban on outside employment was passed in 2016. This ban was part of a deal that also gave New York's City Council a [larger-than-planned pay raise](#), lifting their pay above that of our own City Council's.

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## **City Council will debate limits on outside employment in wake of Bobby Henon's bribery conviction**

By Laura McCrystal, The Philadelphia Inquirer, November 29, 2021

Philadelphia City Councilmember Maria Quiñones-Sánchez said she plans to introduce legislation next year limiting outside employment for Council members, a reform measure in response to Councilmember Bobby Henon's [conviction on federal corruption charges](#).

Quiñones-Sánchez said Monday that she is still working on the legislation, which would restrict but not entirely prohibit outside employment, require transparency, and include caps on outside salaries. She made the announcement as she gathered outside City Hall with State Rep. Jared Solomon, who is a Democrat from Northeast Philadelphia, and members of government watchdog groups to announce a petition for reform.

“I think folks know that after what we all witnessed and lived it’s about time that we make some bold decisions,” said Quiñones-Sánchez, a Democrat.

A federal jury [convicted Henon and union leader John Dougherty](#) this month of bribery charges, finding that Dougherty bought Henon’s loyalty with a \$70,000 annual union salary from Local 98 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. Prosecutors said Henon used the power of his office to influence legislation in City Hall that advanced Dougherty’s agenda. Henon is paid \$136,000 yearly as a councilmember.

Both men face years in prison when they are sentenced in February and have maintained that they did not break the law.

Quiñones-Sánchez and Solomon, who have both clashed with the union in the past, could face an uphill battle to gain support for reform. Solomon said all Council members and members of Philadelphia’s delegation in Harrisburg were invited to Monday’s news conference, but he and Quiñones-Sánchez were the only ones who attended. They have also been [among the only lawmakers to speak out](#) publicly since the verdict.

The two lawmakers unveiled a “people over politics” petition along with the Committee of 70, Common Cause Pennsylvania, and the League of Women Voters. They are calling for a consideration of public financing of elections and an end to dark money in politics in addition to limits on outside employment.

“As Democrats, the time has come,” Solomon said. “We can’t any longer be a party that calls out corruption and the plague of big money and politics in Washington and Harrisburg but looks the other way when it’s happening right here at home.”

Quiñones-Sánchez said she will talk with colleagues and research employment limitations for public officials in other states before introducing her bill. She said there would be exceptions for outside work, such as guidelines for elected officials who own their own businesses. Other exceptions, she said, could include letting Council members teach university classes or coach youth sports teams. The bill would require disclosure of outside work to voters, though state law already requires reporting of sources of outside income.

“The public deserves to know what that is, they deserve to know how much time you spend in that so when they’re voting for you they make a decision as to whether they’re electing a full-time legislator or a part-time public servant,” she said.

Elected officials and others in top roles in Mayor Jim Kenney’s administration already provide annual financial disclosure statements listing their sources of income and gifts they’ve received. Quiñones-Sánchez’s legislation would take it a step further by restricting outside income that members can have and how much they can make.

The petition launched Monday also calls for the consideration of [public financing of elections](#). Under Dougherty, Local 98 was a powerful political force that helped many politicians, [including Kenney](#), win election. Council has held hearings exploring public financing, and Quiñones-Sánchez said the roadblock was agreeing on how much money would go toward it.

While such a change would cost taxpayers money, she said it would be “an investment in democracy.”