

# INTRODUCTION

What is your name as it will appear on the ballot?

Isaiah Thomas

What office are you seeking?

Council At-Large

Campaign Committee Name & Address:

Citizens for Isaiah Thomas

Campaign Website Address:

<https://isaiahthomas4philly.com/>

Candidate Introduction:

My name is Council Member Isaiah Thomas, an At-Large Member of the Philadelphia City Council, and husband, father, and coach. I have dedicated my life to servant leadership and have continued this during my time on Council. As a coalition builder, I have worked and will continue to unite entities across the city to build a better city for our children.

# ROADWAY SAFETY

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: [https://www.5thsq.org/2023\\_issues](https://www.5thsq.org/2023_issues)

## Short Response:

1. a) Will you commit to reducing Philadelphia's annual traffic deaths in half by 2026?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

b) Do you support redesigning Philadelphia's most dangerous roadways if this means eliminating travel lanes for automobiles and parking spaces?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

c) Daylighting is a pedestrian safety measure achieved by replacing curb parking spaces near an intersection with flexible posts, planters, or bollards – increasing visibility for pedestrians and drivers. Do you support daylighting more intersections in Philadelphia if this means removing parking spaces?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Will you support a ballot measure to establish a PHL Department of Transportation, combining the transportation division of the Streets Department with the Office of Transportation, Infrastructure, and Sustainability (oTIS)?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. After two terms in office, the Kenney Administration will have built 30 miles of protected bicycle lanes. Will you support an expansion of Philadelphia's network of protected bicycle lanes by an additional 30 miles by 2028?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: There must be a responsible expansion of bicycle lanes that include neighborhoods where youth are the predominant riders.

4. a) The pilot speed camera program on Roosevelt Blvd has changed driver behavior, improved safety, and saved lives. Do you support making the speed cameras on Roosevelt Blvd permanent?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

b) Do you support expanding speed camera enforcement to more high-crash corridors across Philadelphia?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Use this space if you'd like to elaborate on any of the above short response questions:

**Long Response:**

5. Despite the city taking a Vision Zero pledge to reduce traffic deaths to zero by 2030, more than 120 people died on city streets in 2022. What will you do to significantly lower the rates of traffic deaths in Philadelphia?

As the Chair of the Streets and Services department, I have vehemently expressed concern for this issue. In 2021, I held a hearing to discuss the Hit and Run epidemic that included the vision zero team. In the hearing, the hit-and-run unit shared their frustration with the antiquated methods they have been using due to lack of funding. The following budget cycle, I led the fight to better equip our hit-and-run unit with the technology needed in the capital budget to address these unnecessary traffic deaths while standing with families and victims who have experienced them. All of which is just the start as we know this issue remains prevalent across the city.

6. Many curb cuts, crosswalks, bus stops, and sidewalks across Philadelphia are routinely blocked by illegally-parked vehicles. How will you address this specific problem?

This spring, I introduced the Citizens Watchdog Bill, which will compensate constituents for reporting quality of life issues. One of these issues is double parking or illegal parking. The goal of this is not to remove the city's responsibility but to ensure we begin to curb the behavior of those who feel there is no penalty for obstructing safety. Drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and bus riders all deserve safe.

7. What is your plan to ensure the city's sidewalks are safe and usable for all pedestrians, including people with disabilities and families with strollers?

As the Streets chair, I've had many discussions with the Streets department leadership and staff about the issue of sidewalk safety. The hard-working employees of the Streets and Services department are working to ensure that all sidewalks in the city are ADA accessible, however, there has been a significant delay due to staffing issues within the city. My office will continue to advocate for essential upgrades of city infrastructure; and ensure the departments that ensure the quality of life for residents, such as Streets, are adequately funded.

## PUBLIC SPACE

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: [https://www.5thsq.org/2023\\_issues](https://www.5thsq.org/2023_issues)

### Short Response:

1. Will you support an expansion of the current municipal street sweeping program, even if it means non-compliant motorists may receive parking violations or have their vehicles towed?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you support easing regulations on outdoor dining streeteries and facilitating more parklets and pedestrian plazas even if this means eliminating space for parking?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Use this space if you'd like to elaborate on any of the above short response questions:

The future of Streeteries should be examined on both the district and city-wide levels. It is crucial to understand how different neighborhoods will be impacted. As a member of City Council, during the discussion for streeteries, I believe it best to listen to the

input of all stakeholders while prioritizing the community members preference. There are creative approaches to ensuring business growth while supporting residents.

**Long Response:**

3. Place-based interventions like greening vacant lots, repairing abandoned homes, and planting street trees in Philadelphia is linked to a reduction in violent crime, a decrease in illegal dumping, and lower rates of depression among residents. How will your office work to accomplish these place-based interventions in historically-disinvested neighborhoods?

I believe that every Philadelphia resident should be able to feel pride in their community. These areas that have been historically disinvested require great support, which is why my office has partnered with organizations to push for increased beautification projects in neighborhoods that need it the most. In a gun report published by my office in 2022, I detailed a collaborative plan across city departments to address gun violence. A significant aspect of this plan was an increased investment in the Horticultural Society Cleaning and Greening initiative, which my team and I ensured this past fall. Through partnership and clear collaborative goals, we can begin to address the needs of neighborhoods across Philadelphia.

4. Philadelphia's public spaces suffer from two main types of improper waste disposal: littering and illegal dumping. For decades, the City's reduction and removal efforts have been woefully inadequate. What would you do to solve this issue?

As the chair of the Streets and Services department, I've heard many complaints about issues with illegal dumping and litter in our streets. I will continue to push for proper funding for the Streets and Services department and will continue to find alternative solutions for dumping. For example, this past fall, I created the Citizen Watchdog Fund as a way to reward Philadelphians who help the government deal with many issues, including illegal dumping. The reward, determined by the Managing Director's Office, will be decided based on the extent of the violation, the accuracy/specificity of the information provided by the Citizen Watchdog, and the Citizen Watchdog's cooperation with a potential investigation/legal proceedings.

5. The city has struggled to staff and adequately fund city services, which has resulted in reduced hours at libraries, pools, and recreation centers. How would you ensure consistent and convenient hours for these facilities?

During this past budget cycle, I fought for meaningful reforms and opportunities to recover economically for all Philadelphians. The use of recreation centers being limited to weekdays has diminished the potential impact that recreation centers can have on communities. With that in mind, during the fiscal year of 2022-2023, I advocated for \$5,000,000 to shift the hours of operations and allow recreation centers to stay open on Saturdays and Sundays. Since children are primarily in school when the recreation centers are open, they cannot participate in the programs the City implements for their benefit. During this discussion, significant issues arose in conversations with the administration and the Parks and Recreation Department as we faced one of the most considerable staffing shortages of our time. That is why in addition to pushing for funding, we must work to find collaborative ways to increase library staff so that our doors can remain open.

## TRANSPORTATION & TRANSIT

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: [https://www.5thsq.org/2023\\_issues](https://www.5thsq.org/2023_issues)

### Short Response:

1. Do you support the City of Philadelphia enrolling all municipal employees into the SEPTA Key Advantage program?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: There should be an option for employees interested without extending the program to staff who are not.

2. Do you support the City establishing a fare discount program for low-income riders?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other:

3. Do you support congestion pricing - a toll for vehicles entering Center City and University City during peak travel times - with funding used for improving public transportation?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: It is unclear if Philadelphia's density is high enough to justify this option. However, I am open to supporting studies to

determine if it is and what the impact on consumer and employee behavior would have.

4. Do you support increasing the cost of monthly residential parking permits and using the funds for improving public transportation?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: The price for residential parking should be dynamic and flexible. There should be a consideration for the differences between neighborhoods in terms of costs to pursue an option of redistributing some of the revenue to offset the costs for low-income residents and those with special needs.

5. a) Do you support expanding bus-only lanes throughout Philadelphia, even if this means removing a lane of travel for personal vehicles or parking?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: In certain sections of the city, this could produce substantial gain and support with safety issues on some of the denser roadways.

- b) Do you support using camera technology to enforce bus-only lanes and bus stops by ticketing violators?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Will you advocate for increasing local transit funding to SEPTA?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you support a subway/metro line for Roosevelt Blvd?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: If this initiative was proposed as a ballot question, I will support what the people of Philadelphia want to see.

8. The City of Denver launched a popular e-bike rebate program in an effort to reduce vehicle miles traveled. The rebate program offered \$1,200 for income-qualified residents and \$400 for everyone else for e-bike purchases. Do you support a similar program here in Philadelphia?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: I would be interested in examining the cost versus benefit of introducing this program.

9. Do you support micro-mobility initiatives such as scooter share programs for Philadelphia?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: I am open to a conversation around this issue.

Use this space if you'd like to elaborate on any of the above short response questions:

For #9, I answered others due to the City's great need to focus first on safe and efficient transit before creating an additional potential avenue for safety issues to occur. We must focus on our resident's ability to live and travel safely no matter where they live in the city.

**Long Response:**

10. What are your ideas for combating Philadelphia's problem with traffic congestion?

As the chair of the Streets and Services department and driver who travels to every part of the city regularly, I have experienced the frustration of Philadelphia's traffic congestion. I believe the first goal should be to create safe streets and upgraded roadways to ensure all residents' safety, especially pedestrians. We can push to decrease the number of car trips under 1 mile through better support of public transportation and planning.

11. What are your solutions to ensure SEPTA rebuilds its ridership post-pandemic?

SEPTA must have proper resources to create a safe, clean, and reliable transit experience for all residents, no matter where they utilize public transportation. By increasing the quality of service, SEPTA will not only rebuild its post-pandemic ridership but go even further. SEPTA remains a major artery in the functions of the city, and we must support them and hold them accountable for the services provided to our community.

**Personal Travel Habits:**

1. How often do you ride a bicycle for transportation in the city?

☐ Never      ☒ Yearly      ☐ Monthly      ☐ Weekly      ☐ Daily

2. How often do you ride public transportation in the city?

☐ Never      ☒ Yearly      ☐ Monthly      ☐ Weekly      ☐ Daily



3. How often do you travel by car in the city?

☐ Never      ☐ Yearly      ☐ Monthly      ☐ Weekly      ☒ Daily

4. Will you commit to taking public transportation at least one week of each year while in office?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other: \_\_As a father of young kids, coach, and Councilmember, a majority of my days begin close to 6 am and end at midnight. Commuting around the city requires a mix of transit options. I know other residents share this story, and that is why we must build a system that would allow this to be a real option and not one so focused on an old understanding of work commutes only.

How do you typically commute to work? Describe your experience traveling in Philadelphia and what you would do to improve it.

Most days, I drive from Northwest into Center City before heading into Kensington to coach. I consistently deal with issues of safety, traffic, and more. I use these experiences, in combination with the stories shared by constituents to inspire legislation that runs through the Streets and Services Committee.

## HOUSING & LAND USE

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: [https://www.5thsq.org/2023\\_issues](https://www.5thsq.org/2023_issues)

### Short Response:

1. Do you support eliminating minimum parking requirements for all of Philadelphia's zoning categories?

☐ Yes      ☒ No      ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Will you veto or vote against downzoning overlays?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: Legislation is always about making choices and tradeoffs. Legislating in absolutes tends to carry heavy consequences and set bad precedents. However, downzoning is used more often than necessary but my primary opinions come from listening to my constituents.

3. Do you support legalizing Single-Room Occupancy dwellings (SROs) in all multifamily and commercial zoning districts across Philadelphia?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: Similar to the above response, I will continue to prioritize the voices of my constituents when considering legislation with SROs and commercial zoning districts in Philadelphia.

4. Will you support designating Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) overlays city-wide, allowing increased commercial and residential zoning density near all rail transit stations in Philadelphia?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: I believe that TOD's should be considered around most transit access points, however, I believe additional research is needed.

5. Should our city government encourage the growth of Philadelphia's population back to 2 million residents?

☒ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Other:

6. Should our zoning allow for denser housing in high-income, high-amenity neighborhoods to accommodate more residents?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☒ Other: We should focus on creating desirable neighborhoods all over the city. As we improve on strengthening these communities, individuals will select neighborhoods by preference without needing to consider amenities.

Use this space if you'd like to elaborate on any of the above short response questions:

**Long Response:**

7. The affordability crisis hits renters harder than owners. Philadelphia Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) estimates the city needs about 70,000 affordable rental units to meet demand. How will you address this affordable housing shortage?

I believe the landbank and neighborhood preservation initiatives are some of our best options to address the affordability crisis. All actors need more of a concerted effort to address the cost of building and development in the city. A major component of the slow speed at which these initiatives are moving will be eliminated once the Federal Reserve no longer raises interest rates, making many projects much harder to pencil out.

8. Record low housing supply has pushed up home prices, closing off the possibility of home ownership to many first-time homebuyers. The median home value in the Philadelphia metropolitan area has reached \$320,000, increasing \$100,000 from 5 years ago. How can we keep neighborhoods affordable and sustainable as Philadelphia sees more growth and development?

The housing crisis in Philadelphia has been a long-standing and deeply troubling issue for many of our residents. The crisis is mainly driven by the lowest minimum wage of any surrounding state and historically low wages for workers. My team has met with and listened to many constituents that have struggled with issues surrounding homestead exemption, rental assistance, and inadequate conditions. Additionally, we must continue to tap existing projects like the Neighborhood Preservation initiative to address disparities in housing. We know the city has not adjusted to the rising housing costs and the decrease in our homeownership rate in recent years. The lack of housing in the City will require a combination of solutions involving rental assistance, land bank utilization, and transparency within departments.

9. Philadelphia faces some serious headwinds from more residents and businesses considering leaving the city for the suburbs, more than at any point in the last two decades. What do you think must happen to ensure the region's economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic comes out in urban-Philadelphia's favor?

We must focus on the basic needs of Philadelphians to recover best. This includes incentivizing individuals, families, and companies to live and conduct business in the city of Philadelphia. I will push for increased quality of life and more responsible community-centered economic development. I will continue my support of minority-owned businesses by restructuring business taxations for small businesses. Additionally, I will continue to support the arts and culture sector, heavily invest in public safety, and better our school's culture, climate, and curriculum.

## CLOSING STATEMENT

Tell us more about what you bring to the table as an ally for urbanist politics in City Hall. Why should 5th Square endorse you over other candidates running for your position? What makes you the right person to advance the urbanist movement's goals politically at the local level?

In no specific order, I am a Council Member, a father, and a coach - I wear all hats at all times. Whether on the court, in my house, or my City Hall office - my priority is always serving the young people in my life. I see my children and Philadelphia's youngest constituents as a priority - not for the future but for today. Every race that I've run and every piece of legislation that I've championed is to further the goal of making Philadelphia work better in a youth-centric way. As the chair of the Streets and Services department, I am dedicated to improving the safety, design, and issues found on our streets. My staff and I have spent countless hours listening to our community's concerns with our streets and will continue to prioritize the voice of my constituents. As a Council Member (and father and coach), I believe in big policies that benefit every neighborhood and quality time spent in these streets with Philly's finest. I am seeking your endorsement because I know that we share this vision - of working in every neighborhood, with every family, to make Philadelphia better for all of us.