

INTRODUCTION

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

Andrés Celin

What office are you seeking?

City Council, District 7

Campaign Committee Name & Address:

Friends of Andrés Celin

Campaign Website Address:

andresforcitycouncil.com

Candidate Introduction:

For far too long, our neighborhoods in North Philly have been abandoned by city leadership. As a result, we face a humanitarian crisis. The 7th District is the poorest part of the poorest big city in the country. It's the epicenter of our gun violence and opioid epidemics. Our families and neighbors are forced to do the impossible everyday to make ends meet. Due to the lack of accountability from city leadership, voters turn out to vote at lower rates than any other districts.

Every one of us in the 7th District deserves a safe community, an affordable home, and a real chance to learn and grow. To turn the tide, it's going to take connecting with voters face-to-face—listening to them, being honest with them about the crises we face in our city, and inviting them to be part of creating collective solutions.

For over a decade, I've served my community in the 7th District as an educator, social worker, and community organizer. I've dedicated my life to engaging my community to be involved in the policy process and take ownership over solving our most pressing issues. As Councilmember, I will do the same.

I was born in South Carolina, and grew up with my family in Cali, Colombia. My dad worked at a local bank, and my mom was a teacher at my own elementary school. Later, I came to the Philly suburbs on a scholarship to Haverford College. When I graduated, I started working at Edison High School. There, I helped students in classrooms, ran after-school programs, and connected young people to mentors in their community. Later, at Congreso de Latinos Unidos, I served as a family case manager, working with parents to advocate for their rights and the rights of their

children. I saw how these parents had effectively been criminalized for the conditions they found themselves in—poverty, lack of access to good jobs, and a broken social safety net.

For me, this work was personal. As a young father, I've helped raise my daughter largely remotely. For long stretches, I've had to build a relationship with her over camera. As a parent advocate, I knew the pain that I'd always felt being distant from my daughter was nothing compared to the pain and trauma I saw in parents' faces when they were forced to join my program. That's when I knew the system needed to change. Up to that point, I wanted to help my community. But that experience made me realize I had to fight injustice.

For five years, I worked with Kensington youth, training and mentoring them to fight for change at their neighborhood schools—and bring these skills home to their neighborhoods. In 2017, I led a youth campaign to save educators' jobs at Kensington Health Science Academy.

As an organizer in Kensington, I realized just how much we need allies within our city government willing to fight with us. This moved me to join Councilmember Helen Gym as Outreach Director. At City Hall, I helped make policy, working hand-in-hand with community organizations. I saw how much our City budget is a reflection of our moral priorities. Most importantly, I saw policymaking as a place to build community involvement and trust. As District City Councilmember, I will use the distinct powers and influence of my seat to build spaces for neighbors to come together and design solutions collectively.

ROADWAY SAFETY

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: 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: _____

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 an organizer, I've coordinated voter engagement efforts in Kensington and across the 7th District. Residents have consistently brought up car and pedestrian safety issues—and the need for the City to invest in tackling them. We need to invest more heavily in speed bumps, on both residential blocks and in high-traffic commercial corridors. We also need to make livability investments that function as investments in community and road safety, including street lights and upkeep of traffic signs and road signs. More broadly, we need to look at data on where most incidents are happening in the 7th District—and citywide—and advance a re-design process for resident safety.

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?

Here in the 7th, we have a high volume of abandoned cars on residential blocks. We need to increase City investment in towing abandoned cars as well as enforcing existing policy regarding illegally parked vehicles.

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?

Many of our sidewalks (and roads) in the 7th are in very poor shape. This can make it difficult for residents to walk safely in their communities, drop off their children, purchase food and medicine, and use public recreation spaces. It's critical that our sidewalks are safe for everyone, especially people with disabilities and caregivers traveling with strollers. Investing in sidewalk safety needs to be prioritized in the City budget cycle; specifically, we must use remaining ARP funds over the coming years. To get there, we as policymakers need to advocate jointly with community stakeholders.

PUBLIC SPACE

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: 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:

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?

As City Councilmember, I believe strongly that all these quality of life investments are central to my responsibility to our communities in the 7th District. As someone who has led youth programs and worked to connect families to services as a social worker, I have seen firsthand how the absences of such investments lead to further blight, disinvestment, marginalization, and ultimately to crime. Most neighborhoods in the 7th have faced generational disinvestment. Given the gun-violence epidemic and Kensington's humanitarian crisis, these investments should be at the top of our City's priorities. I will work to advocate for them as my top priority for the 7th in the FY25 budget cycle.

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?

Here in the 7th District, littering and illegal dumping are critical issues that demand systemic solutions. For too long, the City has signaled that these practices are OK in neighborhoods with entrenched poverty. We need enforcement and accountability. This starts with hiring and training City employees who can anchor a more robust enforcement infrastructure. The Streets Department also needs to prioritize engaging with community members and showing that the

City is prioritizing waste disposal in their neighborhoods. Many community-based organizations conduct cleaning efforts of their own; we need to develop a collective culture of accountability regarding littering.

As a staff organizer with Youth United for Change, I worked with high school students to develop a process that ultimately produced a pilot plan for Norris Square and parts of Fairhill to expand free trash cans. The plan was built on extensive community surveying and consultation. Especially with our public spaces, we need more efforts like this one that bring the community into the process of designing and taking ownership over solutions.

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?

As Councilmember, I will fight for our libraries to be open 7 days per week, including through the evening. Our rec centers should also be open 7 days per week, including mornings and evenings. Additionally, staffing levels need to be increased and vacancies filled to ensure adequate levels of programming. This will require investing additional resources to streamline hiring process and increase staff retention.

As a City Hall staffer, I've seen the budget season serve as a moment to organize community power for Libraries and Parks and Recreation systems. In 2022, I helped organize the push for more money for the Free Library System to fund facilities and staff. I worked with groups ranging from AFSCME DC 47 and DC 33 to Friends of the Library and other advocates based in Black and brown communities. Together, we fought and won an increase \$10 million in the budget. Moving forward, our city's investments in our Library and Parks and Recreation systems should be viewed as anti-violence interventions. As such, they should be funded via general fund resources indexed for these interventions.

TRANSPORTATION & TRANSIT

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: 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: _____
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: _____

4. Do you support increasing the cost of monthly residential parking permits and using the funds for improving public transportation?
- ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____
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: _____
- 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: _____
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: _____
9. Do you support micro-mobility initiatives such as scooter share programs for Philadelphia?
- ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

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

In terms of scooter share programs, I would first want to work with research partners to better assess the potential risk of increased traffic-related deaths based on the experience in Denver, and other cities with high concentrations of scooter use.

Long Response:

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

While traffic congestion is not an issue that I've had experience working on, I support 5th Square's focus on congestion pricing. In general, we should prioritize models like this one that fund public transportation and incentivize its usage.

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

The crisis conditions faced by 7th District residents help light the way toward rebuilding SEPTA ridership. We need to expand hiring and training of SEPTA staff to supervise trains, maintain

rider safety, and connect those going through homelessness and addiction—many of whom use SEPTA for shelter and safety—to services. Additionally, we need to expand investments in making train stations ADA accessible. Finally, SEPTA’s Bus Revolution process provides an opportunity for SEPTA to deepen its community engagement—especially in the 7th, which ranks lowest in civic engagement. With a community-driven process, SEPTA can build community ownership over SEPTA and help ensure it’s supporting riders most in need.

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

I have always used SEPTA to commute to work, with a few periods over the years when I've prioritized biking when possible. I've always lived close to SEPTA rail lines, making public transportation the most practical option. I believe SEPTA ridership is what the City should strive for. The bar should be making public transportation the most practical and cost-effective choice for as many Philadelphians as possible. In the process, we can grow revenue for long-needed investments in SEPTA infrastructure.

HOUSING & LAND USE

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: 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: _____
3. Do you support legalizing Single-Room Occupancy dwellings (SROs) in all multifamily and commercial zoning districts across Philadelphia?
☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____
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: _____
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: _____

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

In terms of question #1) while I generally support reducing minimum parking requirements, I think it is important to assess the degree to which doing this places undue burdens on low-income residents being able to get to work while managing other economic and family responsibilities if the current public transportation infrastructure is not currently adequate to support this. I would want to work with research partners to establish a baseline assessment for each zoning category.

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?

The writing is on the wall: Philadelphia is facing a housing crisis. First, a large percentage of families are cost-burdened, paying more than 30% of income on housing expenses. Second, there are simply not enough affordable housing units for all individuals and families for those who need them. Meanwhile, most existing development projects focus on market-rate housing, which fuels gentrification across working-class, Black and Brown neighborhoods. As Councilmember, I will take a multi-pronged approach to expanding affordable housing as a means to addressing this crisis. My work will include:

- Reforming land bank disposition policies so as to prioritize non profits and other organizations who are committed to developing affordable housing as part of their charter
- Indexing affordability requirements used in planning and policy development to neighborhood-level average median income
- Utilizing funds to provide low interest credit and other kinds of supports to affordable housing developers
- Further prioritizing Land Bank dispositions for affordable housing projects and community land trusts
- Developing a standard for Community Benefits Agreements for all new development in the 7th District and use it to actively make recommendations on all zoning variances

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?

I believe it is our responsibility to ensure that working families and long-term residents are able to stay in their homes and their communities. A citywide affordable housing strategy must be focused on the development of new units. The policy proposals outlined in the previous question begin to move us in the right direction, but City Council should also be pushing the Administration to develop a clear strategy to leverage state and federal funding to incentivize and support the development of affordable housing units in low-income neighborhoods.

As a District Councilmember, I will prioritize developing strong relationships with developers working in my District and actively support engagement and good-faith negotiations with Registered Community Organizations to ensure they are prioritizing both CBAs that invest back into the community and truly affordable units as a part of each development project.

Finally, I believe that our inclusionary zoning policies should be strengthened to adhere to the emerging economic research on such policies' impact. They should focus on larger geographic areas within the 7th District.

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?

Firstly, the Administration and City Council must work together to develop a long-term financial strategy to make Philadelphia less reliant on wage taxes as a whole. Additionally, investing in high quality public services and public spaces (i.e., parks, recreation centers, etc.), as well as in neighborhood schools, not only serves as a set of anti-violence and community development strategies; it also creates more livable neighborhoods that incentivize workers to stay in the city.

We also need to develop a proactive plan to begin transitioning traditional business office spaces into residential properties or work spaces such as research facilities in order to incentivize the concentration of high-skilled professionals who need to perform their work in person.

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?

I am running to be the Councilmember for the 7th District as a progressive leader, and my primary commitment is to ensure that our communities receive the same quality services and enjoy the same quality public spaces that Philadelphians enjoy in every other part of the City. I believe it is possible to make our City more sustainable, economically prosperous, diverse, and welcoming while also prioritizing serving our hardest-hit neighborhoods and communities.

My years of experience doing community-based work, as well as building coalitions for progressive and urbanist policies on council, have informed every part of my policy platform and would guide my approach as a Councilmember. It is not enough to secure budget line items and design elaborate policies —our responsibility as City leaders is to evaluate our policies based on how their impacts are felt on the ground, and to improve them with clear feedback loops based on effective community outreach efforts in our most vulnerable communities. I am clear that re-building political trust in my district must begin by bringing community members into the policy design and evaluation process, and I see this as one of my most important responsibilities if I am elected.