

INTRODUCTION

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

Seth Anderson-Oberman

8th District City Council

Seth for the People

Seth4thepeople.com

My name is Seth Anderson-Oberman. I am a Black working class union organizer, dad and Germantown resident running for 8th district City Council.

I grew up in Germantown and moved back 15 years ago with my wife to raise our children here. I have spent 41 of my 52 years living in the 8th district. We love that Germantown is a proud working-class Black neighborhood where people look out for each other. But the Germantown we know and love may not exist in 5 years. We've watched as our neighborhood high school was closed and the community shut out of the planning and development process. There are currently four larger apartment buildings going up within a three-block radius of our house. Two-bedroom units are renting for \$2500. We have lost neighbors and my kids have lost friends whose families were forced to move because of rising rents. We know that our own children won't be able to afford to live in the neighborhood they grew up in, unless we organize, build community power, and fight back.

I have been a union organizer for the past 23 years, fighting alongside thousands across multiple states and within our own district to build power in their workplaces, neighborhoods and through the ballot box. I have been an activist since I was in college, where I helped lead protests against union-busting and community displacement in North Philadelphia. My recent efforts include co-founding the Philadelphia Labor for Black Lives Coalition and fostering youth-led activism as a member of the Board of Directors for the Philadelphia Student Union. Now, I am helping neighbors build power in our community by running for City Council.

As a union organizer of 23 years, I know that working people only win what we're organized to take. My decision to run for City Council is about organizing with my neighbors to demand a future for our district that we write, *together*, affordable housing justice, community-led development, fully funded and safe public schools, a public health approach to community safety, and union jobs at family sustaining wages.

Our campaign represents a broad coalition that centers our working class in the struggle for well-resourced neighborhoods – towards the creation of a more just and equitable future for the 8th district and Philadelphia more broadly. I believe that local government is something we do together. The people of the 8th district deserve to have accountable, transparent, and bold leadership that cares about every community, every block, and every neighbor. That's why I am running.

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:

I strongly believe that permanent surveillance systems are not long-term solutions to our community safety concerns. I will support safety measures in place that are already working, such as the installed cameras on Roosevelt Boulevard, but I would also remain open to assessing other measures that have proven effective in other areas of the country. Our approaches to road safety must be viewed as a whole system, rather than individual issues and parts. I support rethinking this system to improve the issues that branch from a problematic foundation – rethinking how we make traffic stops, how our roads are built to preference cars over pedestrians and transit, etc..

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?

My neighbors and I have been fighting to get speed bumps on our block in Germantown for over 5 years. On the corner of the street where we live, there is a rec center, where kids and families regularly travel to and from on foot. I have listened to neighbors across the district report similar hard-fought attempts to improve their road safety conditions over the past decade with little to no action from their City Councilmember. In some areas of the district, notably wealthier ones, we see roads with no potholes, ample speed bumps and street lighting. In other areas, there are roads in abysmal form – plagued with speeding, dumping and deadly street conditions. No one should have to fight tooth and nail to earn basic safety measures that could save lives. No part of our district should experience disproportionate rates of traffic deaths or accidents. These are policy decisions.

As 8th district City Councilmember, I will be committed to lowering rates of traffic deaths in Philadelphia by being a fierce advocate for constituent calls for increased safety measures on their own blocks and by supporting/advancing safety policy which expands access and use of these measures.

I want to be clear in my commitment to providing equitable constituent services throughout North and Northwest Philadelphia. This has been missing from the 8th district for far too long and contributes to the incredibly dangerous road conditions in our neighborhoods. Equitable constituent services looks like; directing increased resources towards areas most affected by traffic deaths, the same areas which have been denied access to these resources for far too long. It also looks like responding to calls for increased road safety in *all* areas of the district, with accountability measures to ensure resources and attention are equitably distributed.

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?

I believe armed police officers should not be tasked with responding to illegal parking calls or ticketing violators. The idea of public safety enforcement officers is on the right track to shift these responsibilities, but I would need to know more and hear community input from folks across our district before advocating for a specific proposal.

The issue of illegal parking is not cut-and-dry. In my own district, many residents are forced to illegally park due to the influx of new apartment buildings going up in our neighborhoods, built with no on-site parking. To address this problem closer to the root, we need policy which requires new apartment buildings to have on-site parking. Simply punishing working class people by ticketing them for parking is not a long-term solution to this issue.

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?

I really appreciate the policy points listed in the section of 5th Square's 2023 plan, Prioritize Sidewalk Repair. I would be honored to have a conversation about each of these policies and assess the best ways to advocate for their implementation. Sidewalk safety requires a comprehensive and multi-layered approach that centers accessibility for people with disabilities and repairs in our hardest hit neighborhoods. This means fully-funding sidewalk repair programs and accessibility initiatives.

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:

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 support requiring the land bank to prioritize the disposition of properties to favor low-income and cooperatively owned developments, including land trusts. We have an ample amount of vacant lots in our district which have immense potential to become sites of place-based interventions. I have spoken with residents who have used vacant lots on their blocks as sites of community gardens for decades but are thrown out at a second's notice when the lot is sold from under them to wealthy developers. The community must have decision-making power in the development that occurs in our neighborhoods. Our community members have been calling for place-based interventions for decades; community greenspace, fixing abandoned homes, renovating vacant properties. But these measures must be done responsibly, allowing long-term residents to remain in their homes after neighborhoods are greened and re-invested in. Therefore, these conversations must be held alongside conversations of housing justice.

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?

Illegal dumping and littering has been a massive problem in district 8 for over a decade, and in some areas these issues have worsened *significantly* over this time. Our City Council office can be doing more to respond to constituent calls for trash clean-up and illegal dumping enforcement. I will actively search for innovative solutions to illegal dumping that looks at effective measures instituted across the country. Again, I do not believe that cameras is a long-term solution to issues facing our neighborhoods. We need to tackle this crisis by tracking it to the systemic root causes of littering and simultaneously support crafting and advancing policy which moves us towards a trash-free Philadelphia *while* supporting our neighborhoods in reducing the harm that is currently being done by illegal dumping and trash overflow.

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?

I support allocating funding to fully-staff our centers of growth, rec-centers, pools and libraries 7-days a week. We also need funding to make much needed repairs in these buildings so they can be supportive and safe environments for staff and the public. I will be a fierce advocate for these critical, essential measures. There is literally no excuse for not having these centers of growth be adequately funded and supported.

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: I would need to familiarize myself with traffic studies and the projected impact of a subway on traffic congestion before taking a formal position - also hear community input.
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:

Scooter share programs and other micro-mobility initiatives have very serious and real impacts on the accessibility of public space. Scooter share programs in other cities have been denounced by disability activists for violating the ADA. I would never support initiatives that violate the ADA. Any micro-mobility initiative considered in Philadelphia must be in full compliance with Title II and involve community conversations around accessibility with relevant stakeholders at the start of the process.

Long Response:

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

Philadelphia's traffic congestion stems mostly from workers' commuting to and from work. In addition to expanding SEPTA's ridership by offering free or reduced fares, I believe we should also look at national efforts to shorten the work week to four days instead of five; encourage employers to adopt alternative work schedules that allow employees to work three twelve hour shifts or four ten hour shifts instead of five eight hour shifts. We should also consider incentives that encourage employers (where possible) to build in more work from home flexibility. We should look to avoid solutions that punish working people for having to get to work. Taken together, these measures would drastically decrease traffic congestion.

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

I fundamentally believe public transportation should be free and I will support measures that move fare policy in this direction. This includes fare capping, eliminating transfer fees, and integrating the regional rail system with bus and subway lines.

The safety of our transit system is also a major concern. The answers to creating a safer SEPTA system must come from increased investment in approaches to public safety which are community-rooted, non-carceral and centered in meeting residents' basic needs.

This can look like providing social services to folks using stations as shelter, appointing non-police officers trained in crisis intervention to de-escalate situations where folks are having mental health crises, and more. We must look to other cities where public health interventions are already proving effective in increasing transit system safety while also not contributing to the mass criminalization and stigmatization of riders experiencing housing insecurity and/or mental health crisis.

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 am a union organizer for a statewide local. Most days I work from home and work by zoom and phone. When I do field visits I drive to our various union chapters around the state. Most of my facilities that I organize are in remote rural areas that are not accessible by public transportation. My last car was a Chevy Volt, which I loved. My next car will be an electric or hybrid vehicle. I would love to get to a place in life where a car is no longer necessary.

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:

I feel like I need more information to answer these questions. The benefit of adding 500,000 people to our city's population is not immediately evident to me. I also have serious concerns about how we're taking care of our current residents as we move to expand the population. I would commit to meet with 5th Square to understand your theory of the case and consider supporting data.

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?

We need to fundamentally re-define 'affordable' in this city. I support the re-definition of 'affordable' to be no more than 40% of the current poverty level for a family of four in a given neighborhood.

I will:

- Work alongside allies in the state and federal legislatures to update and modernize the Philly Housing Authority's properties and practices to better respond to the immense need for affordable housing, now.
- Fighting for comprehensive rent and mortgage relief that addresses the historic inequity exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Increasing funding for deeply affordable housing, – and preserving and renovating existing affordable housing to keep families in homes.
- Fully funding legal aid and defense counsel to meet the right to counsel requirement for all eviction cases.
- Expand funding for housing first opportunities for persons experiencing homelessness
- Invest in home repair, weatherization, and housing efficiency to help keep folks in their homes and work towards an 8th district with green infrastructure.

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?

As Philadelphia sees more growth, we need to ensure that while we are welcoming new residents into our neighborhoods, our long-term and existing residents are not being unjustly pushed out (see responses to question 7 for specific policy points). We also need to ensure that our community members have a voice in these decision-making processes which affect every aspect of our lives.

For far too long, the 8th district has been shut out of the planning and development process. Projects of all sizes have been dictated to us, only performatively bringing community members at the last moment of the process. Our neighborhood high school, Germantown High was shut down and sold for pennies on the dollar to a developer who has done nothing with the near city block sized building for over a decade. In 2017, a [toxic gas plant](#) was placed in the middle of Nicetown over the organization of the residents who did not want it there – now spewing 158x the amount of toxic emissions than the previously used boilers into the lungs of nearby residents. Our beloved YWCA has sat vacant for many years, despite community plans put forth to include affordable housing units. Where has our City Councilperson been throughout all of this?

We demand *community-led development* where residents are involved in shaping the future of our neighborhoods. This involves strengthening the role of the city's communities, including its RCOs, Block Associations and CDCs, so that our people have greater control over zoning and

construction in their neighborhoods. It means working with good-faith developers who have a stake in our community to build the projects we want to see here. It also involves changing our district City Council leadership – a position which wields immense power in shaping development in our districts.

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?

The region's economic recovery is only ensured if we need to meet the needs of working people. We need to work to increase the number of and access to family-sustaining union jobs in Philadelphia. We need to guarantee housing as a human right for all residents. We need to ensure all children in our city have access to safe and fully-funded schools. And this is just the bare minimum. Ensuring the economic recovery of the working people of Philadelphia is the path towards economic recovery for the entire region. We are the foundation of this entire city, we make this city run.

I believe we have two paths ahead of us. The first is to create an economy where we all grow together – which allows our communities regardless of income level, to access resources needed to thrive. The other option is to continue down the 40 year path that led us to this point - a path dictated by finance capital and powerful multinational corporations. This is a path that has imperiled our middle class, our working class, and our poor. This is a path which has put increasing burdens of climate change, community disinvestment and uncontrolled development disproportionately on the shoulders of Black and brown communities across our city. But it doesn't have to be this way. It hasn't always been this way and it's up to us to organize for the world we need and deserve.

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?

For far too long, constituents in the 8th district have been fighting alone to win needed measures to increase neighborhood safety. We deserve a City Councilmember who is committed to being accessible, transparent, and accountable to their constituents and broader stakeholders of Philadelphia. We deserve a City Councilmember who is willing to bravely fight for a different vision for our city – one that centers housing and safety as human rights, poverty reduction through community investment, and good governing practices.

Our campaign doesn't take money from wealthy developers, fossil fuel or corporate interests, and never will. I have always held myself accountable to working people, my neighbors, to our collective well-being, and will continue to do so when elected.

As a union organizer with decades of experience, I have a strong track record of delivering wins for working people – helping thousands of workers across multiple states build power in their workplaces, neighborhoods and through the ballot box. I know that working people only win what we are organized to take. I am looking forward to organizing to win the measures we need to make this city a safer, more equitable and just place to live. I look forward to 5th square being at the table alongside community members and other stakeholders for discussions around built environment policy and action.