



ISSUE #1 – Suburban Shelby County as an Asset

Shelby County is unique among Tennessee’s metro counties. It is by far the largest county (47% larger than the second biggest county). It contains four of Tennessee’s Top 15 cities - the State’s largest city as well as three cities over 40,000. No other Tennessee county comes close in possessing such multiple large communities within their jurisdiction.

Suburban Shelby County has a population of 250,000 residents which would make it the third largest city in Tennessee or the fifth largest county. The population of suburban Shelby County grew by 20% from 2000 – 2008 and is totally responsible for the county’s positive population gain during this period while Memphis’ population actually declined by 3%. The suburban contribution to Shelby County’s property tax revenues continues to increase - exceeding its per capita share - which runs contrary to the opinion of many inside Memphis. Likewise sales taxes collected in Suburban Shelby County are equal or slightly larger than its share of the population. Total build-out potential for non-Memphis Shelby County has the potential of exceeding 500,000.

The future of suburban Shelby County looks bright. However, there are some who believe that the growth of the suburbs is detrimental to the core city of Memphis. They would argue that Memphis must remain strong at the expense of the suburbs if necessary. Few people are aware that the City of Memphis is already larger than many major metropolitan core cities including Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Denver, Miami, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Seattle. Yet these cities are economically vibrant and the fact that their suburban communities have been responsible for their regional growth seems to be overlooked by many in Memphis.

QUESTION # 1

What are your views regarding the role that the suburban community plays in the future of Shelby County and how will you engage its citizens and elected officials into programs that unite all of Shelby County?

ISSUE #2 – Economic Development

Economic growth is essential for a community's sustainability and prosperity. Wealth creation is a function of the private sector and a thriving community is one which has a dynamic business climate. Elected officials who fail to see the direct correlation between a community's successful private sector and competent government is a recipe for disaster. Business friendly environments have a competitive edge over those that place greater hardships on free enterprise. Government's role in economic development is to encourage business by creating a just and level playing field and to lessen the burden of doing business.

Shelby County is fortunate to have many great assets both public (airport, river port, utilities, roads, recreational venues, parks, etc.) and private (FedEx, railroads, trucking firms, corporate headquarters, healthcare, commercial developers, agribusiness, manufacturing, tourism, etc.). To utilize and leverage the community's public and private assets is a major responsibility of the County Mayor. Shelby County has a great opportunity to heighten its economic potential, but only if its leaders have the vision and the ability to articulate its strengths.

QUESTION # 2

What is your vision for the economic future of Shelby County?

QUESTION # 3

Does your vision include the creation of an Office of Economic Development that reports directly to the Mayor and is separate from Planning & Development?

ISSUE #3 – Economic Development & the Suburban Chambers

In 2005 a new economic development initiative for Shelby County was unveiled by Memphis Tomorrow – “Memphis Fast Forward”. It was touted as the most comprehensive economic development strategy ever undertaken by the community which included the input of over 3000 local entities. Surprisingly, none of the six suburban chambers of commerce were included in the plan. When the suburban chambers approached elected officials and business leaders about the absence of the community chambers, we were basically told “sorry but the train has left the station”.

The omission of the suburban chambers from Memphis Fast Forward was the primary impetus for the creation of the Alliance. It has become obvious to Alliance members over the past few years that there is little or no interest on the part of elected officials and business leaders within Memphis to reach out and include the suburban community, especially in the sharing of funds. The fact that suburban Shelby County is the most dynamic part of the county in terms of population growth and economic development activity, it seems logical that the County’s funding for economic development should include the participation of the suburban chambers. Yet to date, under Memphis Fast Forward, not one penny has been earmarked for the suburban chambers.

The leadership of Shelby County government must recognize the importance of including the suburban community in developing a truly comprehensive economic development strategy. Likewise, the suburban chambers must recognize that they are critical agents for the future prosperity of Shelby County and must become more proactive in their economic development efforts.

QUESTION # 4

What role do you see the suburban chambers of commerce taking in the county’s overall economic development strategy and will you include the suburban chambers in the County’s annual funding toward economic development?

ISSUE #4 – Shelby County Schools

Shelby County Schools, the State's fourth largest system, is among the best performing school systems in Tennessee far exceeding other major metropolitan systems. It has achieved this success with funding per pupil that is 95% of the State average of \$8345. Memphis City Schools on the other hand spends \$10,366 per pupil or 124% of the Tennessee average, yet has one of the lowest performance rankings in Tennessee.

From an economic development perspective, Shelby County is extremely fortunate to have two separate school systems – it provides residents and newcomers a choice of public schools. A luxury which residents and newcomers of Davidson, Knox and Hamilton counties do not share.

There has been much discussion about the merging of school systems and/or funding. There is no concrete evidence to prove that merging school systems will result in better performance or create a more efficient system. On the contrary, many studies suggest that smaller school systems are much more efficient and result in better student performance. Advocates of Single Source Funding argue that suburban taxpayers are not shouldering their share of the burden. Politicians have totally confused the issue by distorting the truth. Suburban taxpayers are paying the same county tax as Memphis taxpayers. The disparity in education expenditures is due to the simple fact that decades ago the citizens of Memphis "elected" to augment education inside the city, thus paying more in taxes for each student. Today, however, Memphis citizens resent the higher taxes and no longer wish to enhance the system. Unfortunately for Memphis, the State will not allow the city to withdraw its funding. A precedent has been established, it is told, and Memphis must abide by its earlier decision. Shelby County Schools, on the other hand, is burdened with the ADA dilemma which seems to defy rational thinking.

Memphis and Shelby County are by no means alone in the challenges facing education, both in funding and performance. Nashville City Schools, for example, are experiencing a crisis in their system which some argue is worse than Memphis. Socio-economic factors, obviously, play a role in student performance but the argument that more money is the solution is becoming difficult to justify based on the evidence.

QUESTION # 5

What is your philosophy regarding two separate school systems, single source funding and the solution to the ADA dilemma?

ISSUE #5 – Consolidation

Come November citizens of Memphis and suburban Shelby County will decide separately if they prefer a consolidated metropolitan form of government to the current system. This will be the third attempt to form a metropolitan government in 40 years.

The issue has become very emotional. Supporters and skeptics of consolidation seem to have based their decision more on personal assumptions than on reviewing the facts. Most citizens seem totally confused about the issue and will probably defer to their favorite elected officials to advise them on choosing for or against.

One of the strongest advocates of consolidation is Memphis Tomorrow. This group of business leaders believes consolidation will eliminate duplications thus creating a more efficient government. However, evidence that consolidation will lower taxes or create a more democratic system is lacking. Surprisingly, very little in the way of empirical studies have been performed to determine if consolidation, in general, is markedly beneficial for the taxpayer. Results are mixed. The fact that only 30 counties in the US out of 3000 are consolidated makes one wonder. If consolidation were to occur it could open a Pandora's Box regarding dual school systems, municipal reserve areas, law enforcement, voting districts, democratic representation, etc.

The candidate who is elected County Mayor will be impacted by the vote regardless of its outcome. Though the candidates are basically on the sidelines regarding the vote, his thoughts and comments will definitely have an influence on voters.

QUESTION #6

Do you feel that there are significant duplications in city and county governments which warrant consolidation and would result in a savings to taxpayers?

QUESTION #7

Instead of consolidating governments, would it not make more sense to consolidate specific departments or functions such as what happened with the Office of Planning & Development?

QUESTION #8

What impact do you believe consolidation, if passed, might have on the future on Shelby County Schools, the flight of suburban residents to bordering counties, and the impediment of future residential and economic growth in Shelby County?

ISSUE #7 – Infrastructure

Good infrastructure is the foundation of a viable community and is a direct investment in future prosperity. As suburban Shelby County grows in population and economic activity it will be crucial for the County to oversee the fair distribution of funds needed to enhance Shelby County's economic growth.

There is concern by many that suburban Shelby County does not receive the same attention for infrastructure improvements as Memphis and that this could impede suburban growth.

QUESTION # 9

What measures will you take as Mayor to ensure that the allocation of funding for infrastructure will be fair and equitable for both Memphis and suburban Shelby County?

ISSUE #8 – County District Reapportionment

The State Constitution requires that counties reapportion their districts once every ten years based on the latest federal Census. It further states that the legislative body can not exceed 25 members, and no more than three representatives shall be elected from a district. The growth pattern in Shelby County over the last ten years has favored suburban Shelby County and should be reflected in the next reapportionment.

There is concern that forces within Memphis will attempt to gerrymander the county so that the suburban vote is diluted.

QUESTION # 10

What measures will you take as Mayor to ensure that suburban voters have fair representation in the next County Commission redistricting?