



Mayor Jim Strickland's

Better Memphis

Anti-Poverty Plan

During his 2015 campaign, Mayor Jim Strickland developed a multi-faceted plan to reduce poverty, restore neighborhoods, and enhance communities. This document is in two parts: 1) a plan summary and 2) an update of some of what has been implemented (Summer 2016).

The Better Memphis Anti-Poverty Plan

COMPONENTS

1. Letter from Jim Strickland: “A Tale of Two Cities”
2. Early childhood education and literacy
3. Housing
4. Hunger, nutrition and food insecurity
5. Homelessness
6. Asset building
7. Aging and senior services
8. Blight and trash in Memphis
9. Population growth and developing the inner city
10. Livability and environment
11. Parks, community centers, and libraries

LETTER FROM JIM STRICKLAND (Summer 2015)

To the People of Memphis:

The great challenge for the next Mayor of Memphis will be addressing the unacceptable level of poverty that is crippling Memphis’ progress and leaving another generation without the opportunity to thrive and succeed. Memphis is a stark “Tale of Two Cities” where the disproportional gap between the wealthy and the poor has grown exponentially.

29.8 percent of Memphis residents live below the poverty line.

47 percent of children in Memphis are living in poverty.

191,609 of the population in Memphis lives on less than the federal poverty level.

We have the highest level of poverty in the nation for a major U.S. city, and we are twice the national average. In Mayor Wharton’s State of the City address in 2012, he said he would have a plan for poverty in 100 days. It has now been three years, and the plan was just released, and there has been no execution. We need immediate action, and we need a Mayor with a sense of urgency.

Memphis must recruit and retain high quality jobs using our primary assets including our role as a major transportation, shipping, and logistics hub and expand existing jobs using our geographical advantages.

City government must play a role in helping women and minority small businesses grow and prosper by paying contracts within 30 days. Many small business owners struggle to survive and meet a payroll because of the delay by city government in paying bills.

We must capture additional jobs through incentives, education, workforce and vocational training. Expansion of the tourism industry and the convention center in the coming years will create a need for construction jobs and the potential for higher wage jobs in the hotel, restaurant and entertainment industry. We must provide opportunities for the unemployed and ready the workforce for the potential expansion ahead.

We have to provide a transportation system that better connects low-income households to existing jobs and provides incentives to corporations to locate in the inner city and near easily accessible models of transportation.

My plan for a “Better Memphis” addresses short and long term solutions to target poverty and improve the quality of life for the 191,609 Memphians that struggle daily with the issues of housing, food insecurity, senior care, literacy, and financial management.

It is the great irony of our time, but it costs more to be poor in America. Government, community leaders, churches, and nonprofit organizations must come together to lift those struggling and build a better community for all our families.

*Sincerely,
Jim Strickland*

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND LITERACY

Research shows that early childhood education pays dividends not just later in childhood but also well into adulthood. Children who attend Pre-K are not only much more likely than their peers to be ready for Kindergarten, they are also more likely to graduate from high school and one day attend college. In addition to focusing on early childhood education, adults who fell through the cracks of the education system must also be targeted.

Strategies

- ❑ Work with partners to expand Pre-K and continue the push for universal Pre-K.
- ❑ Commit city lobbying efforts toward protecting and securing funding for universal pre-K.
- ❑ Promote adult education and literacy resources and lead effort to increase enrollment.

HOUSING

Housing costs, and the burdens that accompany these costs for many homeowners and renters in our community, are a growing crisis in Memphis. It will be a major focus of the Strickland administration to reduce housing burdens for Memphis residents and families.

Strategies

- ❑ Use historic preservation tax credits.
- ❑ Explore new revenue sources for affordable housing.
- ❑ Expand oversight for unacceptable and dangerous living conditions.
- ❑ Better coordinate existing housing activities and goals.
- ❑ Streamline systems that are unnecessarily increasing the costs of housing development.
- ❑ Modernize housing data systems.
- ❑ Reexamine the performance of key housing regulations, programs, and policies.

HUNGER, NUTRITION, AND FOOD INSECURITY

Not having enough to eat and not having good quality, nutritious food can have short- and long-term effects on mental and physical health. Curbing food insecurity and ending food deserts will be a priority.

Strategies

- ❑ Make Memphis a national leader in supporting the rights of breastfeeding mothers.
- ❑ Increase incomes by working to create more jobs.
- ❑ Work to educate healthy food choices.
- ❑ Encourage and promote African-American entrepreneurship in the food system arena.
- ❑ Seek to expand programs that give kids snacks and meals to get through the weekend.

HOMELESSNESS

The Strickland administration will make strides to further reduce homelessness within the city and will focus particularly on the needs of homeless veterans.

Strategies

- ❑ Work with partners to end veteran homelessness.
- ❑ Take short-term actions to help homeless, including a new shelter plan.
- ❑ Pursue long-term plans to reduce and eventually end homelessness.

ASSET BUILDING

Many families in Memphis have limited access to traditional banking services. They often turn to predatory lenders, pawn shops and costly check-cashing services to get by. Financial security and assets give low-income people the independence necessary to pursue productive livelihoods and overcome injustice.

Strategies

- ❑ Expand public awareness and advocacy efforts to educate low-income families on debt management and financial goals.
- ❑ Bring in third-party groups to compare rates and loan practices.
- ❑ Increase public awareness of predatory lending and check-cashing practices and look to strengthen existing laws to protect the community from predatory lenders.
- ❑ Educate and expand the opportunities for students from families who are unbanked or underbanked.
- ❑ Leverage the city's financial assets to build banking allies to 1) create low or no-cost checking accounts for individuals living at or below the poverty line and 2) create low down payment and low-interest loans for home ownership in the inner city.
- ❑ Set Memphis on a path to raising property values for existing homeowners.
- ❑ Increase minority participation in city contracting and awareness for available contracts.

- ❑ Place further city restrictions on check cashing services and surging debt repayment fees.
- ❑ Promote volunteerism of retired businesspersons to assist with personal financial assistance and startup businesses.
- ❑ Increase the number of Memphians with safe bank accounts and established credit.

AGING AND SENIOR SERVICES

The growth in the 50+ population will have a profound impact on Memphis. In our city, approximately 15 percent of the elderly population lives below the federal poverty line. For Memphis to truly realize its full potential, this untapped reservoir of knowledge and experience needs to be tapped and utilized in full.

Strategies

- ❑ Work to establish Memphis as a Retire Tennessee city.
- ❑ Research the feasibility of passing a visitability ordinance modeled after Atlanta and Pittsburgh.
- ❑ Work with the planning department to begin implementing guidelines to help older drivers and pedestrians.
- ❑ Integrate age-inclusive policies as criteria for city decision-making.
- ❑ Research the possibility and impact of expediting permitting process for secondary apartments for older adults.

BLIGHT AND TRASH

Memphis won the Nation's Cleanest City award four years in a row from the 1940s to 1950s and also won eight national awards from Keep America Beautiful from 1980 to 2002. City government must turn the tide against blight to reclaim our status as one of the nation's cleanest and most attractive destinations.

Strategies

- ❑ Enforcement of residential codes and pressing vacant housing owners to keep buildings up to code.

- ❑ Consolidation of code enforcement efforts.
- ❑ Revitalization of repossessed housing.
- ❑ Increased accountability of code enforcement.
- ❑ Expand tax incentives to encourage expansion into blighted areas, and offer residential tax incentives to facilitate the sale of housing properties in blighted areas.

POPULATION GROWTH AND DEVELOPING THE INNER CITY

The city's stagnant population over an ever-expanding area makes the cost of delivering services more expensive. A priority for the city is to reverse the trend of outflow of population to the suburbs. It is also an objective to reduce the economic segregation that dominates the area, reduce blighted properties, and redevelop the inner city.

Strategies

- ❑ Offer tax abatements for 5-10 years to encourage new homebuyers to buy within the core of the city.
- ❑ Provide tax abatement for increased valuation resulting from improvements to property for new construction and renovation.

LIVABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT

Becoming a more sustainable community requires that we do a much better job of protecting and preserving our natural resources and improving overall environmental quality. More and more, environmental stewardship is a necessity tied to our ability to compete in the global economy and attract new investments and jobs.

Strategies

- ❑ Conduct an audit of City of Memphis waste.
- ❑ Implement a city-wide recycling challenge.
- ❑ Partner with nonprofit groups to promote awareness of the Walkability Toolkit.
- ❑ Improve walking and biking safety laws and regulations.

PARKS, COMMUNITY CENTERS, AND LIBRARIES

Unfortunately for many residents in Memphis, our parks, community centers, and libraries aren't accessible, safe, or well-maintained. City parks and community centers can offer countless benefits to residents fortunate enough to have them in their neighborhoods.

Strategies

- ❑ Conduct audit of safety/security of centers, parks, and libraries.
- ❑ Reduce crime by improving the physical environment.
- ❑ Establish a Memphis anti-graffiti network, focusing on parks and areas surrounding our community assets.
- ❑ Intervene in the lives of young people so they choose the right path.
- ❑ Establish Adopt-A-Mile/Adopt-A-Park programs, starting with partnerships with city-run senior centers.

Summer 2016 Update: Action Items

Mayor Jim Strickland and members of his administration have taken action on many of these items this year:

Creating a down payment assistance program: Mayor Strickland authorized a program whereby the City of Memphis is providing up to \$10,000 to help homebuyers with down payment and closing costs to complete the purchase of a home inside the city limits. Programs are available for first-time homebuyers and for existing homeowners wanting to sell their current homes and upgrade or downsize to a home that better fits their needs.

Increased minority contracting: Mayor Strickland reorganized the city's minority and women-owned business contracting efforts and hired Joann Massey to lead the office. He made it a priority for divisions during their budgeting process. And in just his first four months in office, MWBE contracting grew by 17 percent.

Revamping MATA bus service: The mayor authorized MATA to implement its short-range transit plan by year's end, ensuring a more streamlined and easier-to-use network for bus transit.

Retain and increase jobs: Mayor Strickland made it a major priority to retain ServiceMaster, keeping 1,200 good jobs in Memphis. He is continuing his efforts to meet with business leaders with an eye toward creating more jobs.

Assigning officers to community centers: At the expiration of MPD's contract with Shelby County Schools, the officers previously assigned to schools were reassigned this summer to community centers in an effort to make those centers safe places.

Seeking universal pre-K: The administration has solidified partnerships with People First and Seeding Success to pursue wider Pre-K options for children.

Summer activities: The city has drawn attention to increased summer programs, both city and non-city sponsored, that give young people opportunities. One such program, in partnership

with Literacy Mid-South, is a literacy pilot program in seven community centers that seeks to increase reading skills and reduce the 'summer slide.'

Summer jobs: The city's two youth summer jobs programs, MPLOY and MAP, reached more than 1,400 young people this summer. Working in partnership with the White House, the administration is seeking ways to expand that number in future years.

Cleaning records for non-violent offenders: In March, more than \$55,000 was raised in support of the Better Memphis Fund, which pays for expungement fees. This allows non-violent offenders to re-enter the workforce. The city's Workforce Investment Network, Office of Community Affairs and Human Resources are helping those who receive the grants to effectively enter the workforce.

Seeking solutions for homeless: The administration is in the early stages of pursuing a program similar to one in Albuquerque that would facilitate work opportunities for homeless individuals.

Reducing driver license suspensions: The administration is in the early stages of working with partners to identify and attempt to remove hurdles that exist in the driver license suspension process. This could enable more people to retain their access to transportation to get to work.

Coordinating with the Nonprofit Advisory Council: The mayor meets monthly with the council to make sure that the city isn't duplicating services of a group that has a proven track record, and to identify opportunities for the city to lend its support to groups that are doing meaningful work in the city.