

City Council candidates detail views on LGBTQ+ issues in response to Annapolis Pride survey ahead of primary election



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Annapolis Pride, a nonprofit organization that advocates for the LGBTQ+ community, sent a questionnaire to 17 candidates running for Annapolis mayor and City Council to poll their opinions on various issues that impact the queer community.

Jeremy Browning, chair of the organization, said the questionnaire is intended as a nonpartisan accounting of each candidate's views ahead of the Sept. 21 primary election, such as their opinion on health disparities, public school policies, youth mental health, police reform and training.

"Without any other group in Annapolis advocating for LGBTQ policy, we thought it was really important for voters to know where the candidates stand on these important issues," Browning said.

It's the first time City Council candidates have been asked to address a range of LGBTQ+ issues in a questionnaire, Browning said. The organization plans to continue to survey candidates in future elections. Many questions center on a candidate's past experience advocating for LGBTQ+ rights and anti-discrimination policies in a public setting.

Thirteen candidates responded, one declined and three did not respond to numerous requests from Annapolis Pride, Browning said.

[Scott Gibson](#), a Republican running for Ward 2 alderman, was the lone Republican who responded to the questionnaire. Mayoral candidate Steven Strawn did not respond to the organization, neither did Ward 6 candidate George Michael Gallagher and Ward 8 candidate Rockford Toews. Monica Fenton Manthey, running for Ward 5 alderwoman, declined to participate.

Many Democratic candidates acknowledged they could become a more vocal representative of queer residents in their wards, and mostly support LGBTQ+ rights by supporting queer friends or family members. A handful of respondents said the survey motivated them to join LGBTQ+ organizations, such as Annapolis Pride, PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), or the Human Rights Campaign.

[Keanuú Smith-Brown](#), who is running for Ward 3, would likely be the first openly gay member of Annapolis City Council if he is elected.

The six-question survey asked candidates a range of questions, including on their involvement in supporting LGBTQ+ organizations, advocating for the community, and intentions on improving health disparities in the queer community.

The survey asked for candidates to respond on data from the Trevor Project National Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health, which found in 2021, 42% of LGBTQ youth between ages 13 and 24 seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. Out of the 35,000 people surveyed, overhalf the respondents reporting serious consideration of suicide were transgender and nonbinary youth.

All City Council candidates responded that they were horrified by the high rate of suicide among LGBTQ children and teens, and offered different suggestions for how to increase mental health resources for at-risk youth. [Ward 6 alderman DaJuan Gay](#) and [Ward 8 alderman Ross Arnett](#) both said they would work to promote the city's Community Resource Centers that provide free counseling and medical appointments. [Ward 4 alderwoman Sheila Finlayson](#) cited her successful proposal to fund a city social worker and assistant to the social worker who supports families by helping them access health care, suicide prevention resources and other services to combat mental illness.

All but one of the candidates who responded to the survey supported the availability of single-use, gender-neutral bathrooms in schools, which the county school board passed a policy on this year, as a step toward eliminating discrimination and creating safe school environments. The one outlier, Alderman Rob Savidge, said “I haven’t developed a position on ‘bathroom bills’ and gender identification, and would like to understand it more, but do value building welcoming atmospheres in our schools.”

All responding candidates said they supported the police department and its “community policing” approach aimed at addressing the root cause of violent crime, such as poverty. Several candidates said the police department could add more sensitivity training when it comes to interacting with the LGBTQ+ community.

[Mayor Gavin Buckley](#), who’s running for reelection, emphasized the city has a direct liaison to Annapolis’ LGBTQ+ community and their advocacy groups, along with the Annapolis Police Department, to ensure representation and inclusion when the council proposes new policies.

Other Democratic respondents include Ward 1 alderwoman [Elly Tierney](#), candidate for Ward 2 [Karma O'Neill](#), Ward 3 alderwoman [Rhonda Pindell Charles](#), candidate for Ward 4 [Toni Strong Pratt](#), Ward 5 alderman [Brooks Schandelmeier](#), Ward 7 alderman [Rob Savidge](#), and candidate for Ward 8 [Kati George](#).

The candidate’s answers to the questionnaire can be read at annapolispride.org.