

Four mayoral candidates responded to the Crosstown Coalition questionnaire by the suggested March 13 deadline: Lynne Abraham, Nelson Diaz, Jim Kenney, and Doug Oliver. No answers from Tony Williams. To see the full text of the each response go to the Crosstown website  
Some interesting highlights from the responses:

- *THE TEN YEAR TAX ABATATEMENT*: Abraham answered "yes" to the question of whether the abatement program should continue as is and suggested that it be extended to neighborhoods "just beyond the reach of development" on a fifteen to twenty year basis. Diaz disagrees, and writes that the program's benefits have "overwhelmingly gone to Center City" where he characterizes the growth as largely self sustaining so that, in his opinion, terminating the abatement will not significantly reduce Center City growth. He suggests that the program should be installed in "outlying commercial corridors that have not shared in recent growth." Oliver's answers are similar to those of Diaz. He states "now that redevelopment has occurred, a reevaluation is appropriate" adding that development could occur "in certain neighborhoods even without receiving the benefit of a tax abatement". Kenney sidestepped the question by noting his past vote in favor of the abatement scheme but offering no opinion as to its continuation.
- *FREQUENCY OF REAL ESTATE TAX REASSESSMENTS*: Oliver calls for 5 year reassessments. Kenney suggests reassessments every two to three years and Abraham takes a similar approach, stating that best practices call for yearly reassessments but that, due to budgetary constraints, three years would make sense. Diaz failed to answer the question presented - "how frequently should reassessments occur?" and instead observed that "abrupt, dramatic changes in tax levels are not fair" so that "more frequent, less dramatic changes would better serve..."
- *SHIFT FROM WAGE/BUSINESS TO REALTY TAXES*: Diaz, Kenney, and Oliver agree that a shift should be made away from wage and business taxes. Kenney calls for a higher tax on commercial properties without mentioning that this approach would probably entail an amendment to the uniformity clause of the Pennsylvania Constitution. Diaz specifically urges an aggressive push in Harrisburg to amend the law. Both Diaz and Kenney refer favorably to the proposal championed by Paul Levy of the Center City District and Jerry Sweeney of Brandywine Realty Trust which is designed to reduce wage and business taxes. Oliver notes that such a shift puts more money in residents' pockets which helps the local economy and discourages workers and businesses from leaving the City. Abraham replies that the question does not admit of a "yes or no" answer. She states that a case can be made for eliminating the net income tax, reducing the wage tax and increasing the gross receipts tax but observes that the best approach is to place all revenue sources "on the table." rather than focus on any particular revenue source.
- *SALE OF TAX LIENS*: All four candidates favor the sale of tax liens with provisos. Abraham answers "yes" to the sale of tax lien question adding that, as mayor, she would investigate all methods of increasing revenue. Diaz states that tax lien sales should be an option on the table but cautions that the experience of some cities which have sold liens en masse has not been positive. Kenney favors yearly sales of the most marketable liens on investors, commercial and industrial properties. Oliver favors the sale of liens but only for out of state property owners.

- *COUNCIL'S PROCESSING OF THE PGW SALE:* All four candidates agreed that Council should have conducted public hearings last Fall on the proposed sale of PGW, even Kenney, who noted that he could have called for a vote on the question but, instead, chose not to anger and embarrass his colleagues.
- *STREAMLINING LAND BANK PROCEDURES:* Question 8 inquired whether the requirement that Council approve all Land Bank sales should be eliminated from the Land Bank Ordinance. Abraham supports the elimination of the Council ordinance provision as does Diaz who suggests that Council's representation could be assured by increased representation on the Land Bank oversight committee. Kenney and Oliver temporize, observing that if the current processes cause unnecessary delays, they would support efforts to streamline the process.
- *CREATING A PERMANENT INSPECTOR GENERAL:* All four candidates said their administration would continue the Inspector General's office. Kenney, Diaz and Oliver would support a charter amendment to create a permanent inspector general in lieu of the current situation where the office exists at the whim of each mayor. Abraham takes a different tack. She endorses the idea of a Charter approved permanent Inspector General but urges that this innovation be part of a complete overhaul of the City Charter.
- *NON PARTISAN ELECTORAL REDISTRICTING:* Under the present system, Council creates the boundaries of the various Council districts once every ten years after the publication of the Federal census. Abraham and Oliver unequivocally favor the creation of a non partisan panel to draw Council district boundaries. Diaz also favors this approach but suggests the Council be provided an up or down vote on the Commission's proposals. Kenney is circumspect and calls for further study of this idea.