

Dear Jim Kenney: Here's How You Can Make Philly Great

We knew that folks from West Philly to the Northeast and all points in between would have advice for our new mayor and strong opinions on the state of the city. So we asked 48 of them. And we weren't disappointed.

By [Lauren McGrath](#) | January 3, 2016

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All photographs by Josh Pelta-Heller and Tiayrra Bradley

Kimyona Evans

*22, West philly; sales associat*elf there were more programs for younger kids, starting from eighth grade to high school, I feel like there'd be less violence. If they have something to do other than run outside, they wouldn't be in trouble.

Jake Cline

*23, Glenside; construction worker*Not enough treatment for people who are struggling with mental illness and drug addiction. That's what I see, you know. I was an addict before, and it sucked.

Pak-Wing Fok

*36, Washington Square West; professor, University of Delaware*The one thing that I find disappointing is the trash collection. People just leave the rubbish on the sidewalks. In Seoul, they have to use government-mandated bags, which are strong and don't tear. Seoul is a very clean city, so maybe that's one way to do it.

Osman Zubair

*22, Northeast philly; student, Temple University*The Mayor should help the school district. Fights happen every day. They don't have enough manpower because of budget cuts, and a lot of kids are afraid that they can't get the education they need.

Naaman Harris

*30, homeless; unemployed*I don't know if anybody could change the crime in Philadelphia. There's so much killing, and people want to sell drugs, go out and rob, shoot people. It's getting worse.

Rochelle Keyhan

*30, Grad Hospital; executive director, Feminist Public Works*He should continue being the excellent listener that he has been on City Council. You could tell he had such a genuine concern for the needs of the Philadelphians he was talking to and representing. I'm excited.

Troy Crichton

31, Northern Liberties; public defender Bail reform. We have lots of people held in prison simply for being poor. You have people sitting three, four, five months before they can get some money together, which results in losing their jobs, losing their kids, losing their pets.

Kimyetta King

46, West Oak Lane; police officer The city is disgusting-looking. The only area that looks nice is the area that the tourists go to. That's a tradition for Philadelphia. Money is always put into only what the public will see. The outer neighborhoods are always neglected.

Anuj Gupta

42, Mount Airy; GM, Reading Terminal Market Embrace the growing diversity of our city, both the millennial population and our immigrants. Make them feel vested in our city. They are the ones turning neighborhoods around in partnership with folks who have been here for a long time. That's how we're going to continue to grow.

Grace Hong

16, Germantown; student, SLA beeper If you're a leader, you should stay open-minded for what the people need and really listen to others. If you're close-minded, you don't have any space to grow. You're only thinking about what you want to think.

Thomas Austin Spain

27, North Philly; entertainer Put another tax on cigarettes so the money can go to schools. And really think about SEPTA, too, because SEPTA goes on strike almost every time there's a contract negotiation, and it shuts the city down.

Mimi Bell

19, West Philly; student, Art Institute of Philadelphia I'm from Baltimore, so a comparison between Baltimore and Philly is like night and day. I think Philly has grown in the year I've been here. I can just see cleaner streets; everyone's getting more jobs and opportunities. That's a good thing.

Jenny Carpenter

53, Bella Vista; student teacher The classroom size is just too big. I see over 200 kids every day — six sections with at least 33 kids. The kids want to learn and the teachers want to teach, but we really can't reach all of the students. My question for the Mayor is, can you reduce class size?

Dwayne Ross

35, North Philly; barber The Mayor should deal with some 'hood figures, people that have respect in the neighborhoods. I don't care if they're eight-time felons. He's going to have to build rapport and find out exactly what's the problem and what's the solution.

Drew Callaghan

59, *Bella Vista; photographer*The city really needs to get control of the Philadelphia Parking Authority. They need to get friendly. There's no reason for the Parking Authority to be cruel in the way they treat people. A lot of times I feel it's law enforcement for profit.

Marangeli Mejia-Rabell

47, *Rittenhouse; nonprofit administrator*The sanctuary-city status really makes Philadelphia that welcoming city, that City of Brotherly Love that we so much want and respect. I have been here for almost 28 years and I come from Puerto Rico, so I feel like it's really important.

Andrew Noonan

25, *University City; student, University of Pennsylvania*I've noticed murals popping up around the city, and I really like that. It infuses that Philadelphia culture into it, kind of like artsy street art. In general, the city's in disrepair. We need a beautification of the city.

Taequan Dawkins

20, *North Philly; photographer*It comes down to recreational resources. When Mayor Nutter came into office, I saw a whole lot of places being shut down: city pools, sports teams. It's really easy to influence a kid at that point in life, so if they're surrounded by positive things, hopefully they make positive decisions.

Kathryn Casey

60, *Rittenhouse; paralegal*Mayor Kenney is pro-union, and I'm glad about that. What I really am concerned about is how the city workers, the firefighters, the teachers and the policemen are treated. They should be paid more. They should have fair contracts.

Thomas Nailor

25, *Center City; social services employee*Don't get caught up with just Center City folks and your buddies in South Philly and union guys. Make sure everybody who's here has something to be proud of.

Will Williams

20, *Overbrook; retail*Center City is getting a lot better, but in areas around 12th and Lehigh where my grandmother lives, it's not really getting that much better. Make Philly better for the citizens, not the tourists.

Albert Fung

45, *Fishtown; yoga instructor/artist*I have a young son, and I'm seeing the schools around where I live getting better. The neighborhood is nicer and more livable. I have mixed feelings about gentrification, but I think that having energetic people move into the neighborhood is overall a good thing.

Abbey Biery

30, *Chinatown; cake decorator*Try your best! And fix the potholes.

James Holland

29, *South Philly; retail*They could have better policies to make sure everybody doesn't get welfare. Find

out if people are really being honest about their situations. Some people get cash assistance that they shouldn't get, and some people that really need it get denied.

Steven Share

34, Queen Village; community organizer The neighborhoods are expanding. There's a draw for young professionals — the influx of young people, shopping, dining, culture. I'm a Philadelphia native. I moved away for 13 years, and I just moved back because the city's blowing up.

Jamie Gauthier

37, West Philly; executive director, Sustainable Business Network of greater Philadelphia Focus on the development of neighborhood commercial corridors. Our downtown has been doing fantastically. Our neighborhoods are still hurting.

Scott Swank

74, Fidler Square; retired I went to Penn back in the '60s and early '70s, so comparing then to now in terms of restaurants, transportation, a lot of the basic things, the improvements are immense. It's one of the reasons I moved back here — so I could enjoy that quality of life.

Katelyn Brothwell

26, Washington Square West; ICU nurse Fix the PPA. The tickets are really outrageous. They tow your car without any real indication, and getting in touch with them is really hard. It's a real burden for people who live here.

Sunanda Ghosh

41, Logan Square; fund-raising consultant For some, the city is better: more restaurants, bars, parks. But for others, it's becoming more difficult to live and send their kids to good schools. Many people are invisible. Their perspectives aren't considered important. I want city life to get better for all Philadelphians, not just for the privileged.

Isaiah Pierce

24, Center City; artist I love all the new faces that are coming in, but I wish everybody would be a little bit more friendly. I've got a lot of new neighbors. I'll say, "Hey, how's it going?" And they'll look like, "Why is he speaking to me?"

Margaret Fletcher

71, West Oak Lane; homemaker I'd like to see that the young people are able to go to college affordably. They need the opportunity to work and empower themselves. I feel the Mayor has a lot of input, and I know that it can happen.

Vanessa Werring

35, East Passyunk; gallery director We should have more funding for arts in schools. Art is so important in development. It allows children to be really free and open and creative and discover strengths they

may not find in other classes like science and math.

Udi Goodjoines

*13, West Oak Lane; student, Wagner Middle School*The city is getting worse because of the crime. I see people with guns in their back pocket, back of their pants, standing right next to the corner store. And I get scared, so I might go to a different store.

Denise Gist

58, West Philly; disability/unemployed I was born and raised here, and I had the privilege of going to Catholic school. My mother paid for it. It was a great education. But today, the public school system is atrocious. My main concern is the children's education.

Sarah Grey

*35, Fishtown; freelance writer and editor*Tax the rich. Rein in the police. Open up the streets. I'd love to see that happen all over the city — in the working-class neighborhoods, the neighborhoods of color. Give everybody a chance to open up and talk to one another and create community.

Matthew Washington

*38, Olney; construction worker*Fix the potholes. I keep riding in these streets, and there's thousands of potholes.

Carl Cherkin

*65, Queen Village; business relations vice president, Philadelphia Union*Jim Kenney wants to eradicate poverty, improve early childhood education. I'm very optimistic. The Mayor is a man of his convictions, and he will do what he says he's gonna do. At least he'll try. He's a battler. He's a city kid.

Jonathan Maxim

*28, Center City; CEO, Vea Fitness*It's definitely an up-and-coming entrepreneurial city. I would love to see more community involvement, more government-run events that promote small business and promote starting a business.

Mia-Lia Boua Kiernan

*31, South Philly; co-founder, 1Love Movement*We have a lot of values as a city around redemption and rehabilitation and second chances and keeping families together. I don't think we necessarily match that up with our reentry policies or incarceration policies or immigration and deportation policies.

Esteban Dominguez

*21, Juniata; student, Temple University*It's cool that the Mayor graduated from my high school. St. Joe's Prep is about family — you look out for each other. And there are high expectations, because kids want to be challenged. I think he'll take some of that from the Prep and bring it into office.

Shirley Levin

*69, West Oak Lane; retired*Keep it moving and help the people. Everybody has campaign promises, but

they're not doing anything. Don't say what you're going to do. Do it. Easy as that.

Demetris Whiting

*54, North Philly; mechanic*The Mayor needs to stress more what we can do to allow us to come together. A lot of people don't have trust in the system. The system is corrupted because they're making a lot of money off of people being locked up. It's almost like a form of slavery.

Dennis Bradwell

*60, Southwest Philly; store manager*We need jobs. We need better jobs. Not McDonald's jobs. It doesn't make a difference who you are. Race has nothing to do with nothing. Money has no color. I hope Mr. Kenney hears this, and that's why I voted for him — because I do believe in him.

William Rementer

*37, South Philly; computer technician*Lower the crime rate. But I got a second-degree black belt in tang soo do, just in case.

Yaritza Sierra

*27, Northeast Philly; actor*A neighbor of mine was held up at gunpoint a few blocks from where I live. It used to be a good area. I'm making plans to move, for my daughter's well-being and for my own. So that says a lot.

Luna Wolfson

*19, homeless; artist*Improve standards of living for the homeless, especially homeless youth. I've seen a huge increase in homeless in the LGBTQ community. Kids are coming out fast, like younger now. They've got families who are like, "You're 18, we don't need to raise you, get outta here."

Deena Hessler

*75, Rittenhouse; retired*Take Chestnut Street and make it two lanes of traffic, not just for buses and bikes. It causes such a backup with traffic. It's ridiculous.

Andrew Oliva

*27, Chinatown; line cook*Don't fuck up. That's the best I got, honestly.

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