

Vote 2021 &gt; St. Paul

# Carter faces 7 challengers in re-election bid

## City's first Black mayor was elected in 2017

By Frederick Melo  
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Personal care attendant Paul Langenfeld hasn't done much in the way of fundraising, but he's nonetheless matched St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter's campaign war chest almost dollar for dollar. Langenfeld, one of eight candidates to file for the mayor's seat, donated \$25,000 to his own campaign on Aug. 1 and another \$60,000 on Aug. 3. He lists himself in election finance reports as his campaign's own secretary-treasurer. A retired friend from Shakopee donated an additional \$1,000.

By the time filings for municipal office in St. Paul closed last Tuesday, a cast of mayoral challengers had stepped up to the proverbial mound, though few had disclosed who, if anyone, was funding their campaigns. The November election will be decided by ranked choice, meaning voters can rank up to six candidates in order of preference, and there will not be a political primary to whittle down the field.

Most candidates have highlighted street shootings as a particular concern, while others are protesting ash tree removal or basic government bureaucracy. Several want to bring back Fourth of July fireworks, which the municipality hasn't hosted during the Carter administration.

The pandemic, recession, a federal eviction moratorium, a homelessness crisis that appeared to peak last winter and a national uptick in violent crime have infused no shortage of hot-button issues

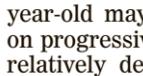
into the political ether.

To date, Langenfeld is the only candidate in addition to the Democratic-Farmer-Labor mayor to file campaign finance reports, which are required once a campaign has raised at least \$100.

And financial acumen will be key in the months to come. Carter delivered his annual budget address online Thursday, setting the scene for tough discussions with the St. Paul City Council and the public at large over city spending and the property tax levy, which was kept flat last year. Cash infusions to city coffers from the federal American Rescue Plan are expected to total \$166 million, equivalent to an entire year's worth of city property tax levy, but it comes with restrictions over how the money can be spent.

Here's a look at the mayoral candidates:

**MELVIN CARTER:** Elected in 2017, Carter made history as the city's first Black mayor and one of its youngest. A former city council member, the 42-year-old mayor campaigned on progressive change, from relatively dense real estate development in places such as Highland Bridge, the former Ford auto campus in Highland Park, to diversity in city hiring.



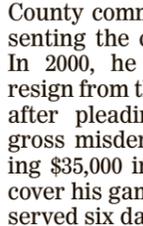
Melvin Carter

His administration has since forgiven library fines, established college funds for newborns, offered \$300 "Families First" rent supplements to 250 low-income families, found emergency housing for the homeless and led the city through a pandemic. He's nevertheless faced criticism, including over his support for a private developer to move forward

with the Alatus housing development on Lexington Parkway despite community concerns about its limited affordability in a mixed-income neighborhood.

Website: MelvinCarter.org

**DINO GUERIN:** Former St. Paul District Fire Chief Dino Guerin served on the St. Paul City Council for three terms in the 1990s and was later elected a Ramsey



County commissioner representing the city's East Side. In 2000, he was forced to resign from the county board after pleading guilty to a gross misdemeanor — writing \$35,000 in bad checks to cover his gambling debts. He served six days in jail.

In 2010, Guerin joined an 11-way race for the state Senate seat previously held by Mee Moua, on a platform that included expanding gambling statewide. He received 8 percent of the vote against John Harrington, who won with 65 percent.

After 31 years as a St. Paul firefighter, Guerin worked for 3M Co. in corporate security before more recently joining the Ramsey County Sheriff's Department as an investigative assistant with emergency management duties. Guerin said he will add at least 100 more St. Paul police officers and crime is his main priority.

"Criminals have taken over the streets. ... Violent crime has escalated under the current mayor's tenure," said Guerin, in a written campaign statement. "The current mayor has repeatedly denied the police chief's requests for additional resources, including more officers and valuable technology, such as ShotSpotter

to help officers identify and arrest suspects of gun violence."

His campaign website goes live on Monday, he said.

**DORA JONES-ROBINSON:** As a little girl, longtime anti-violence advocate Dora Jones-Robinson lost her childhood home in Rondo to interstate construction. She



lists herself on campaign documents as a current resident of Roseville, but she indicated she plans to move back to St. Paul by Sept. 28, which would satisfy the requirement of living within the city for at least 30 days prior to the election.

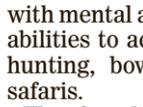
The executive director of Mentoring Young Adults and founder of Guns Down St. Paul, Jones-Robinson said she worked passionately on Carter's previous campaign but the mayor isn't doing enough for the homeless or to prevent gun violence, particularly among youth of color. "Four youth agencies have closed under this current administration," said Jones-Robinson, who described her own youth mentoring agency at 550 Rice St. as one of them. "I've got to get him off that seat."

Jones-Robinson, 56, wants young people who are arrested for gun violence to remain in jail until they speak to her personally, and she's called for the city to create incentives to bring small businesses back downtown. She's also called for the city to reinstate Fourth of July fireworks.

"I grew up in poverty," she wrote in a Jan. 1 guest column in the Pioneer Press. "I witnessed my father being murdered when I was 11. My mother had substance abuse issues. But I had the Loft Teen Center, Martin Luther King/Hallie Q. Brown Center, Ober Boys Club, Inner City Youth League, the Summit University Teen Center and more."

Website: Dorajonesrobinson.org

**PAUL LANGENFELD:** Hastings-bred personal care attendant Langenfeld has for years run the all-volunteer Langenfeld Foundation, which connects people



with mental and physical disabilities to activities such as hunting, bowling and even safaris. The foundation, which in most years operates on an annual budget of less than \$50,000, received a Point of Light Award from then-U.S. President George H.W. Bush, as well as the President's Lifetime Achievement Award from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Langenfeld, 58, who holds a master of divinity degree from the University of St. Thomas, said he has plans to launch "a game-changing 40 new nonprofits over four years," or 10 per year, touch-

ing every corner of the city. The goal is a dramatic reduction in violent crime and property crime. Other priorities include "honoring veterans and celebrating our freedom with fireworks."

Langenfeld served as vice president of the Highland District Council from 2019 to 2021. In May, he organized an "olive branches for peace" exchange, where Highland Park residents received olive branches, according to campaign materials, "as an iconic symbol of bringing peace and order back to St. Paul."

He says he will soon have a campaign website.

**MIKI FROST:** Miki Frost, the father of five children, opened his first "8218 Truce Center" on the corner of Selby Avenue and Lexington Parkway, where he mentors kids ages 8 to 18 in an effort to prevent street violence. Frost, 49, offers kids a safe place to play video games, enjoy snacks and take a load off.

"We try to get them to sit down and call a truce before things escalate," said Frost on Monday, calling himself an independent voice for young people. As a young man, he survived a shooting and served a stint in prison for drug possession. He now advocates for more police on the streets.

On his campaign website, he said a top priority is to hire 40 St. Paul police officers "and implement proven technologies to help reduce crime, including financing a ShotSpotter pilot project in those areas most impacted by gun violence."

"It's time for change, with leadership across the board, not just with the mayor," he added, in an interview. "A lot of people want to get away from the different political parties, and the games being played with the American people."

Website: Mikifrostformayor.com

**SCOTT WERGIN:** Scott Wergin, 67, holds a degree in biochemistry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In online bios, he describes himself as a practitioner of transcendental meditation and a "general contractor (for) multiple companies." A call to his home was not returned. He does not have a campaign website.

**BILL HOSKO:** Downtown coffee shop proprietor, art gallery owner and architectural illustrator Bill Hosko, 58, ran for St. Paul City Council in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 but has never held local office. On Sept. 11, 2001, Hosko finished eighth in the mayoral primary, just behind perennial candidate Sharon Anderson.

Hosko's campaigns have often pitted him against City Hall and its endeavors downtown. In 2012, he fought

against the demolition of the vacant Gillette factory building, which he wanted to see repurposed rather than torn down to make room for CHS Field, the home of the St. Paul Saints.

His priorities this time around include upgrading the city's website, creating an online citywide crime map, adding platform fences and gates to light-rail stations, adding a shared-cart option for residential trash collection, ending individual property assessments for public works projects, moving city elections to even-numbered years, repealing ranked-choice voting, installing term limits for elected officials and establishing a Railroad and Riverboat Museum of Minnesota inside the downtown Union Depot transit hub.

He also wants to bring back fireworks.

Hosko, on his Facebook page and campaign website, said he has door-knocked for more than 160 days and is calling upon the city to take a more measured approach toward ash tree removal. He calls himself "a non-politician who will end partisanship from the mayor's office and bring people together."

Website: BillHosko.org

**ABU NAYEEM:** In 2019, data analyst and Frogtown advocate Abu Nayeem ran for a seat on the St. Paul City Council on a platform that included involving young people in politics, even those not old enough to vote.

He was rarely seen at the time without his "Frogtown Crusader" outfit, a bug-eyed superhero costume that made him the most colorful character by far on the campaign trail. He finished fourth out of four candidates in the ranked-choice election with just over 500 votes.

Nayeem, 33, in a written campaign statement, said he's critical of Carter's many community listening sessions, which "amount to filling out a checkbox for community engagement where the decisions were already made in advance." He's equally critical of the mayor's "College Bound St. Paul" program, which outfits newborns with college funds, because it "doesn't address immediate poverty, and it's a long-term financial liability that has to last for decades to even get a payoff."

Nayeem, who organizes litter pick-up events throughout Frogtown and the Midway, said the city should focus on activities that help more people feel like they belong, including spaces where they can share their hobbies. "I don't care about winning," he said. "I want to empower and inspire communities to find hope in themselves and spread joy."

Website: Abunayeem.com

The election will be held on Nov. 2.

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