

## Boston City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Please submit completed questionnaires by Saturday, May 4.

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### PUBLIC SECTION

*The public part of the questionnaire contains a mix of yes/no and open-ended questions. Please keep all answers to open-ended questions to no more than 150 words.*

#### (A) Your Candidacy

1. What would be your top three priorities if elected to serve?
  - 1) Safe, decent and affordable housing for all
  - 2) Economic development
  - 3) Public safety through an equitable lens

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

I am an attorney, advocate, activist and community leader. I have been successfully making change for several decades within my district and across Boston. I have built housing, created jobs and developed programs for low and moderate-income Bostonians. I worked in the judiciary as an ADA, in the legislature as Staff Counsel and in the executive office under the Mayor's office as the Living Wage Administrator and Director of the Boston Tax Help Coalition. I am a problem solver, a coalition builder and know how to bring people together to get things done.

3. What do you see as the role of the City Council in our strong-mayor system?

While we have a strong mayor system, the council is not without a unique power. The District councillor is as close to the ground as one can get in elective office. I would use this office with the lens of a community organizer and work with residents and leader in each neighborhood to identify challenges and opportunities and solve them collaboratively. I also believe District Councilors can work to build relationships across the different neighborhoods they serve, and I would use my position on City Council to foster a sense of community within District 5.

**(B) The Budget**

1. What programs would you focus your budget advocacy on?
  - Equitable Housing
  - Transit Equity
  - Fully funding BPS, Public schools
  - Community Services, youth programs
  - Anti-poverty strategies
  - Green plan strategies
  
2. The City Council currently has very little ability to influence the budgeting process. Would you support legislation to enable line-item budgetary changes? Are there other measures you would propose to give the City Council more influence over the budget?

Yes, I would support legislation to enable line-item budgetary changes. Additionally, I would review the City Charter and companion historic documents to understand the theoretical construct of this system to determine possible steps to take to modify the power imbalance.

3. More than \$60 MILLION of the requested Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) contributions have been left unpaid. What would you do to improve Boston's tax base regarding PILOT fees?

I would support and play a leadership role in the work being driven by the community/labor coalition to organize, rethink and implement a strategy to increase the voluntary PILOT contributions. Additionally there needs to be more transparency around the accepted community benefits component that allows 50% of the payment be waived based on a "community benefits" allocation. The parameters of this must be rewritten with very specific community driven guidelines.

**(C) Education**

1. What would be your top three priorities for improving the equity and quality of education in the Boston Public Schools?
  - 1) Pass the Promise Act
  - 2) Increase transparency in decision making of the School Committee to begin to rebuild trust with the community
  - 3) Rework policies and implementation strategies for children with disabilities and ELL

2. BuildBPS could significantly change the footprint and configuration of BPS, and possibly trigger the sale of BPS real estate assets. As a City Councilor, what will you do to make sure this process is transparent and driven by improving school quality and equity as the primary outcome?

BuildBPS has been fraught with numerous challenges including unequal treatment of school communities and a building sense of betrayal by the School Committee. I would work with parent leaders, the BTU, the new Superintendent and all who are concerned to address this issue being manifested to make sure communities are being treated in an equitable fashion. The sale of real estate has come up in Hyde Park with the Rogers School and its transfer to DND for a LGBTQ friendly elderly housing development. Two disenfranchised communities are being pitted against each other. I would work with leadership on this issue to develop a transparent process, update all parties about the current status of the Rogers School and hold a hearing to explore what occurred, the current process and develop draft recommendations in partnership with the community that could develop into an Ordinance on transparency and shared decision making concerning RE transfers of the schools.

3. Do you support changes to the current structure of the school committee? If so, what would be your ideal structure? If not, why not?

The current structure of the school committee lacks direct accountability and transparency. An elected school committee would be a step forward in addressing these concerns, therefore, I support either a hybrid or fully elected school committee. Finally, I am a proponent of community driven change, and would work to ensure the teachers' unions, students and parents are all involved in the process of making changes to the school committee structure.

4. What would your priorities be for youth development efforts outside of school time?

One of my key priorities is increasing youth development opportunities in my district. Mattapan has the highest amount of school aged children in the city and a dearth of adequate programs for school age youth. One of the areas I would focus on is youth programming during the summer, particularly career training and diversion programs. Resource equity has been a focus of my career work and community leadership. I would apply this same lens to expanding out-of-school programming. Traditional sports such as basketball leagues need to be funded and expanded, but we also need to conduct a needs assessment in partnership with the youth and develop a plan for expanding programming across the district through Boston's Center for Youth and Families.

#### **(D) Public Safety**

1. Do you support requiring the police department and other city agencies to get City Council approval before acquiring new surveillance technologies?

I would support efforts for greater oversight on the use of surveillance technologies. There are serious legal and constitutional concerns regarding the use of new surveillance technologies. Furthermore, the use of this technology undermines trust within overly policed communities. Instead of infringing on the privacy rights of Boston residents, I would push more effective to increase methods like community policing, which unlike invasive surveillance have shown to build community trust and reduce violence.

2. Do you support District Attorney Rachael Rollins's do-not-prosecute list and expanded approach to dealing with those low-level offenses?

As a former ADA who left the office due to the "lock-em up" culture, I applaud and celebrate the fresh leadership of DA Rollins concerning not prosecuting low-level offenses as a matter of policy. DA Rollins is not saying that these misdemeanors will never be prosecuted. Instead she is very clear this is a strategy to provide dismissal or diversion in the first instance, before arraignment. I completely support this approach.

3. Do you support ending information sharing between the Boston Police Department and ICE? What steps would you take to address the commingling of data?

Yes. We need to review all of the regulations, procedures and actions currently taking place between ICE, the courts, the Commonwealth, BPD and the City. I would work with DA Rollins and city leadership and activists to come up with a proposed alternative, and/or support the leadership currently taking place to address this matter.

4. Do you support shuttering the Boston Police gang database, which tracks the associations and activities of thousands of Boston residents, 98 percent of them Black or Brown?

I have serious concerns about the gang database for a number of reasons, including that it uses an overly broad definition of 'gang-affiliation,' based on subjective police understanding, and targets residents of color. I would support modifying it or even shuttering it and replacing it with a community oriented system that focuses on diversion rather than incarceration. In the last month three shootings have occurred in my district, one of which resulted in the death of a pillar of the community, Eleanor Maloney. In the wake of these events, I have been attending community meeting and speaking with community members working tirelessly to prevent violence. Repeatedly I hear concerns that not enough is being done, and that we need to use every tool available to reduce violence in the community. We need to work to develop an alternative to offer to communities affected by violence, one that is more effective and just.

5. What are your ideas for addressing the opioid crisis, and what would you plan to do to build support for such ideas?

The opioid crisis is impacting all communities and families, and solutions must be both judicial, medical as well as creative. I support the lawsuit AG Healy has filed against the Purdue, Sackler family, while I understand that we need to address what is happening in our communities and on the streets with small time dealers and users who chose to abuse. There needs to be a way to provide some oversight of the user who may be getting his prescription and immediately selling his opioids. Without adding additional stigma, we could create a process to develop a more effective method of oversight including a lottery-type mid-month inventory of patients' prescription use. It is complicated however, many use opioids and find no other way to relieve chronic pain- these patients are not criminals. Additionally, we need to review the current punitive way that pharmacies and doctors are treating those using opioids for sanctioned and fully appropriate pain. I would hold a hearing to look at how to help these patients who are treated like criminals monthly when they try to obtain their prescriptions. I would also seek to draft an ordinance and or work with the Boston delegation to require alternative forms of pain relief be required and covered by insurance at the time of initial injury and opioid prescription, such as deep tissue, chiropractic or reiki.

#### **(E) Transportation**

1. What are your top priorities for advancing efficient, equitable, and environmentally sustainable transportation in the city?
  - Support and aggressively work for the passage Senate Bill S.2046, filed by Senator Nick Collins, An Act to Establish a Rapid Transit Pilot for the Fairmont Corridor, which will expand the Fairmont Line to be rapid transit for a two year pilot period, bring fare price down for Readville residents and allow Charlie Card usage for the train.
  - Partner with the advocates of the North South Rail Link to work for implementation.
  - Improve bus service with a focus on equitable strategies. Work with the MBTA, City Councillor Michelle Wu and the transit community to develop a robust plan using the Better Bus Project planning process as a guide to next steps.
2. Do you support the goal of fare-free public transit?  
Yes
3. Do you support bringing back late-night T service?  
Yes

4. Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. What steps would you advocate to help Boston to achieve this goal?

Vision Zero is an important strategy to make our streets safer. As with all city infrastructure plans, the community must be engaged in solutions from the commencement of the planning and throughout the implementation process. Sidewalk and street safety improvements in low income neighborhoods is lagging. In 2017, 90% of high-income areas had sidewalks, while only 49% of low-income areas have sidewalks. Part of the solution would include expanded public transportation routes so that fewer people have to rely on personal vehicles. Additionally bike safety improvements with physical barriers would be effective on some key streets. Accessible, reliable, and affordable public transportation is one of the key obstacle to reaching the goals of Vision Zero. Public transportation access is limited in District 5, with many areas served solely by commuter rail trains even though they live within city limits.

## **(F) Environment**

1. What are your top three priorities for making Boston a more environmentally sustainable city?
  - a. **Champion Net-zero Building.**

With the current building boom in Boston, we need to work with the BPDA to ensure that all these new buildings are constructed with Net-zero carbon and/or passive house standards. These measures ensure that Boston's new buildings are state-of-the-art in terms of energy efficiency, and would save the city money on future retrofits. Furthermore, I will work to develop a program for retrofitting existing building stock to meet high performance standards, starting with a system for identifying and prioritizing buildings that rate the worst in terms of energy consumption.
  - b. **Stop all expansion of fossil-fuel infrastructure, including fracked gas.**

We must publicly reject the notion, propagated by the fossil-fuel industry, that gas is either clean or a "bridge fuel." While gas emits less carbon dioxide than coal when burned, the extraction, transportation, and distribution processes entail significant leakage of methane, which is estimated to be 85 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. When methane leaks are taken into account, natural gas is equivalent or worse for climate change than coal. In addition, the process of hydraulic fracturing is poisoning the water of our neighbors in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and other Midwestern states.
  - c. **Accelerate the development and use of renewable energy.**

The city of Boston passed the Community Choice Energy (CCE) ordinance to create a program of aggregated purchase of electricity with the specific intent of increasing the usage of renewable sources. We need to rapidly implement this program, and set a high default level for the percentage of renewable energy, i.e. at least 5% on top of the existing 13% RPS requirement.

2. Climate change will have a disproportionate impact on communities of color in Boston. What steps would you propose to make sure that equity is prioritized in Boston's climate mitigation and adaptation planning?

The city is a powerful broker with utilities, state regulators and the legislature, but has not used its clout to date to empower neighborhoods often frustrated by state policy or by utility opposition. This has had concrete consequences for low-income residents of Boston who have sought to advance solar projects that would further city climate goals and combat income inequality. To really support neighborhoods in driving sustainability efforts forward, Boston should advance inclusive energy policies that shift power from utilities or state regulators to community members who have been left out of the green economy. It is not enough to simply praise sustainability when the legislature and utility companies craft policies that exclude renters and low-income residents. Simultaneously, the city's workforce development arm can promote diversity in training and hiring for clean energy industries, which employ thousands of Massachusetts residents but few people of color or residents of low-income communities.

3. Do you support a municipal commitment to power all publicly owned or operated facilities with 100% renewable energy by 2025?

Yes. I am committed to an 100% renewably sourced city by 2025 and this goal must be incorporate this into the city's Climate Action Plan update.

4. Do you oppose the creation of new fossil fuel infrastructure in Boston?

Yes. We need to focus on how we can reduce demand for this dirty source of energy and begin to prune the network of gas pipelines, compressor stations, LNG tanks, etc. I also support directing the Boston Retirement Board to divest of fossil-fuel stocks. It makes no sense to invest in companies that profit from the destruction of the planet. Divestment is a proven tool for catalyzing social change, e.g., South African apartheid, tobacco, etc. The City of New York made a loud and clear statement of value earlier this year when they divested the city retirement board from fossil-fuel stocks. It is time for Boston to stand behind our values. I will join the initiative taken by Councilors Edwards, Wu and O'Malley to advance divestment of the Boston Retirement Board.

5. Do you support the adoption of a curbside composting pickup program?

Yes.

## **(G) Housing**

1. What are the most important changes you would support to make Boston a place where people can afford to live -- and thrive -- at any stage of their life?

We are experiencing an unprecedented building boom and land grab in our neighborhoods, negatively impacting low and moderate-income residents, communities of color, long time residents and disabled tenants. There are several things we can do that would provide some relief right now. Working to pass and implement the Right to Counsel bill currently in the legislature could stem the tide of evictions if implemented swiftly and properly. Passing and funding the Municipal Subsidy proposal for project based subsidies for very low income tenants for both preservation and new construction would also alleviate much of the displacement occurring. Additionally working with City Life/Vida Urbana, the Right to the City and the CDCs to support organizing strategies to target the worst multi-family landlords would also be a priority.

2. Do you support the creation of a city-funded housing voucher program to provide rental assistance for homeless families and individuals in Boston in the face of continued funding cuts and long wait lists?

Yes. I applaud the recent provision of 1000 subsidies provided by HUD to the BHA that will be targeted to homeless families. Additionally, I am working directly with the Campaign to Establish a Boston Rental Affordable Program (Boston RAP) and the City Rent Subsidy Coalition and fully support our goals of creating a program through the Neighborhood Housing Trust to provide RAP funds to be targeted to 70% extremely low income households earning less than 30% of the median, through new money from the 2020 city budget, specifically through the luxury condo property tax.

3. Boston's inclusionary development policy (IDP) requires that 13 percent of the units in a building need to be affordable. (a) Do you support increasing this number? If so, to what? (b) Do you support requiring that a majority of new affordable units be built on-site, in order to ensure communities are diverse and integrated?

(a) Yes, I support increasing the 13% IDP to at least 20%.

(b) I do support retaining those units in the brick and mortar of the site, however, if we could increase the off-site financial allocation to 25-30% with a fast-tracked construction strategy, that could be an acceptable addition to the modified policy.

(c) I am also in support of working towards a 1/3 low, 1/3 moderate and 1/3 market formula in all new construction wherever possible.

4. Would you support the City of Boston building a database that tracks what is being built, where it is being built, and who can afford it in order to ensure that housing policies enacted yield their intended results, and that tracks demographic data on the beneficiaries of housing programs to ensure equity in program design?

Yes, however we would need to have a compliance provision integrated into such a strategy to alleviate the data being collected not being utilized to improve policy for our LMI housing needs.

5. By the 1970s, many cities separated the functions of development and planning/zoning into separate offices. Boston remains a notable exception. (a) What concerns do you have about the current operation of the Boston Planning and Development Agency? (b) Do you support breaking up the BPDA and creating an independent public office of planning?

Full disclosure, I am an employee of EDIC which is the economic development arm of the BPDA, thus I have some knowledge of the organization and systems within it.

- (a) My concerns about the BPDA include but are not limited to, lack of ability to develop and expand affordability of housing units, unwillingness of the ZBA to push back on projects that have a significant amount of community opposition, approval of projects that do not sustain the quality, nature and character of neighborhoods, the unwillingness to push back on luxury developments and the unwillingness to provide transparency as to decision making, as well as not adding simple procedures for additional community engagement.
- (b) I have not seen the current proposals, however I support the theory to provide more accountability to the community.

#### **(H) Economic Opportunity**

1. Boston routinely ranks as one of the most unequal cities in the US. What steps would you propose to reduce our steep income and wealth inequality?

The Boston Federal Reserve Bank's Color of Wealth report and numerous subsequent studies have been clear, Boston is one of the most disparate economies for people of color in the country. Additionally, all LMI households are struggling to stay in our city due to the gentrification and displacement of those with moderate and even middle class means. There are both systematic steps as well as individual wealth building strategies that need to be implemented. Poverty is both an issue of wealth as well as income. I would support all of the housing strategies outlined in this questionnaire above to stabilize housing displacement and work to support limited equity cooperatives and affordable home ownership. Homeownership is the best wealth building strategy there is and wealth stripping has been on the increase since the foreclosure crisis. I would also provide support and funding to programs and services to provide additional wealth building strategies to all Boston residents through BCYF, expand Financial Opportunity Centers and financial coaching, and work to develop more robust Bridge programming in employment training programs. Further I would aggressively work to expand the state EITC to 50% of the federal credit and obtain funding for free tax preparation across Boston and the Commonwealth.

2. Do you support requiring city contractors to give their employees at least two weeks' notice before changing their schedules and to compensate workers for late schedule changes?

Yes. Fair scheduling practices are fundamental to a healthy work life balance. If you as an employee, cannot plan for medical appointments or for your children's activities, while your boss knows that they can take an hour here or there, how is that fair? People work to live, they don't live to work. Furthermore, 78% of people are living paycheck to paycheck. Uncompensated schedule changes can cripple a budget and this abusive practice must be stopped.

3. The cannabis industry is expected to be a major source of growth in Boston in the coming years. Do you support giving licensing preference to city residents and individuals from communities that have been most impacted by the war on drugs over large companies from outside the city?

Yes. However, as the cannabis industry ramps up it has become clear that even the safeguards in place to protect communities most impacted by the war on drugs are being skirted. I support a robust licensing process that gives preference to communities most impacted.

4. According to a November 2018 report, only 0.72% of over 14,000 city contracts were awarded to minority-owned business enterprises (MBEs) (approximately \$4.3 million of \$646 million spent). What strategies would you use to hold the city accountable and dramatically increase the city's investment in MBEs?

32% of all businesses in Boston identify as Minority Owned. We must continue efforts to invest in and foster MBEs across the city as they are the fastest growing sector of the small business economy and will be a major driver of future economic success. We need to ensure we are assisting these businesses grow revenue, which is often harder since they are more community based, and have less access to capital, since they are more likely to be denied loans or charged higher interest rates. I would support an ordinance that stipulated that at least 32% of city contracts should go to MBEs (with the percentage increasing with the corresponding increase in identified MBEs). Additionally, I would encourage all city departments to actively reach out to MBEs so they are aware of available contracts and opportunities.

5. What steps would you take to support artists and the creative economy as a driver of culture and opportunity in Boston?

While the City of Boston has developed dynamic strategies and policies for artists and the creative economy, low and moderate-income artists and their communities are often left behind. I support increased artist housing in all neighborhoods using the  $\frac{1}{3}, \frac{1}{3}, \frac{1}{3}$  formula and increasing the transparency for artists who would like to apply for and obtain this housing. Additionally there is a need for both gallery and work space for artists of color. I would support increasing funding and opportunities to develop such spaces in partnership with the artist community.

6. Boston has 13 designated “opportunity zones,” where investors can get significant tax breaks for developing property. What steps would you propose to ensure that such development yields shared prosperity, rather than displacement?

There are no designated opportunity zones in District 5. I am suspicious of anything that was written into the Trump and Republican Congress Tax Reform Act, a tax giveaway for the rich. It is my understanding that there were limited federal guidelines for this investment strategy, thus there may be little we can do to limit the disparate impact of the opportunity zone investment strategy.

### **(I) Democracy**

1. What steps would you take to increase participation in city government, particularly among voices not currently engaged?

Ensuring equal access to voting rights and increasing participation among all citizens is the bedrock of a strong democracy. We need to look at creative solutions to enhance involvement and participation in all levels of government, but especially in municipal elections and city policy. Some of these could be simple. For example, California has recently looked at eliminating “off-year” elections and has seen increased voter turnout as a result. Some solutions will be more difficult and long term, such as expanding participatory budgeting and increasing participatory planning. Seattle has had great success with their “Safe Routes to Health” program which is a participatory planning process that partners community members with health care institutions to ensure that access to every hospital and clinic is possible through all the various means of transportation. We need to look at what other cities and industries are already doing and build on successes while ensuring that the voices of all residents are represented at the table.

2. Do you support requiring landlords to provide voter registration forms in the packets provided to new tenants?

Yes. Any barrier to voting weakens democracy. We need to make registering and voting as easy as possible and encourage it in every way we can.

3. Cities across Massachusetts and the US have taken steps to engage new constituencies in municipal elections. (a) Do you support allowing non-citizens with legal status the right to vote in municipal elections? (b) Do you support allowing 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in municipal elections?

- a) Yes. Non-citizens contribute to our country in so many ways. They also pay taxes and are affected by policy, yet, they have no voice on issues. Other cities across

the country have experimented with this practice and have found that it leads to more participation and stronger communities.

- b) Yes. Similarly, our city government, especially through education policies, impacts the lives of our young people every day, however, they can not participate in those decisions. Furthermore, studies show that voting is a learned behavior and the earlier you start the more you do it. If we can encourage young people to participate now, they are much more likely to stay engaged in the future.
4. Sixteen of the twenty-five largest cities in the United States have term limits for the office of the mayor. Term limits for executive office help deter the over-centralization of power. Would you support changing the city charter to impose term limits for the office in Boston?
- 5.
6. Elections are a central component of democratic accountability. Do you support keeping the City Council's current two-year terms instead of shifting to four-year terms?

Yes. As a city councilor I expect to be held accountable by my constituents. That will take many forms, but the most tangible will always be elections. Two-year terms allow citizens the opportunity to voice their support or opposition to city councillor's practices and policies in a more real time way than a more protracted four-year term would.

## **(J) Additional Comments**

*(Use this space to make any final comments you deem important for progressive voters assessing your candidacy.)*

I believe that government should be used for impacting change, and my candidacy is about weaving together social justice strategies, community organizing methods and practical solutions, implemented in partnership with the community. We owe residents access and a social contract that provides resources, services and opportunity to build agency through local government, while we provide every avenue possible for full inclusion and equity.