



Voters for a Vibrant Newton PAC 2021 City Council Questionnaire

Thank you for completing the 2021 Voters for a Vibrant Newton PAC candidate questionnaire. To submit your answers, email a PDF copy of this document with your answers by September 9th.

Answers to this questionnaire will inform our endorsement decisions and will be posted online. Please limit each answer to 150 words.

1. What are the three most important issues for the City Council to address in the next term?

- **Zoning**
- **Climate change**
- **Infrastructure – especially streets, sidewalks, parks and athletic fields**

2. What do you see as the key elements of a vibrant village center?

There are many elements that create a vibrant village center. They include:

- An inviting and friendly streetscape with places to linger and meet up with friends. This includes sufficiently wide sidewalks, well paved streets, lots of trees and benches, good lighting, accessibility for all users, sufficient parking for cars and bicycles, and pedestrian safety including cross walks, signals and signs.
- Many shops and restaurants that draw people in, especially independent owners.

- Year-round outdoor dining
- Green space and trees; discourage heat zones.
- Outdoor public space for events and community gatherings
- Public art, especially if it's interactive

3. What are the barriers to getting/keeping vibrant village centers and how would you overcome them?

Everyone wants a vibrant village center but there are many barriers including:

- Rents too high to attract the businesses that we want. We should work with long time owners to include diverse and locally owned businesses.
- Not enough green space and trees - plant more trees and come up with a plan for small parks.
- Limit banks. We should work with developers to offer some commercial space to diverse and locally owned businesses like at Trio.
- Transportation. We should work with MBTA for better transportation in Newton including keeping bus lines running.
- Slow permitting process. We should have “one stop shopping” with easier permitting and to obtain a liquor license.

4. Have you been a consistent supporter or opponent of mixed-use developments that have been previously approved, including Northland, Austin Street, Trio, Dunstan East, Riverdale and Riverside? Please detail your thinking and your actions to support or oppose each.

I support mixed-use developments. They are important for Newton, offering more housing choices to people. Each project should be reviewed in regard to public transportation and walkability; location and scale to the neighborhood; additional green space and trees and reduction of the heat island; range of affordable units; community space and other amenities; building to LEED and passive house standards; electrification of the building plus more.

- Northland – As the biggest mixed use project in Newton, I would have supported it if it was phased so it could be tweaked if needed. A similar sized project in Boston (Washington Village in Andrew Square) was approved at the same time and it's being built in 3 phases. Northland should have been phased.
- Austin Street – I support mixed-use housing here, but this project was built by the wrong developer. A non-profit proposal offered all affordable units.

- Trio – I would have supported it if 1 story was removed or if the façade of the previous building was used and the rest of the building set back.
- Dunstan East – I would support it if one story was removed and the building on Dunstan Street was split into two. The proposal is massive along Dunstan and very dense, 84 units/acre – double anything else recently built.
- Riverdale – I support it. The project includes all of the above.
- Riverside – I support it especially since it has a large commercial base.

5. What steps would you take to encourage more diverse and locally owned businesses in our City?

It is important to encourage more diverse and locally owned businesses. As noted above, providing an inviting and friendly streetscape with sufficiently wide sidewalks, well paved streets, lots of trees and benches, good lighting, accessibility for all users, sufficient parking for cars and bicycles, and pedestrian safety including crosswalks will entice more small businesses including diverse and locally owned businesses. Also important is one stop shopping at city hall, making the permitting process simpler including liquor licenses. Like Trio, work with large mixed use property owners to include some diverse and locally owned shops as part of the special permit approval.

6. How would you use housing tools to further economic and racial equity in Newton, specifically for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)?

From the data, local preference is not increasing BIPOC. I support lowering the local preference percentage. We should increase the percentage of affordable units in large projects including condo projects in the special permit.

7. What percentage of local preference in affordable housing lotteries do you support?

I'm in favor of lowering the local preference percentage in affordable housing lotteries. I need to hear all the arguments and examine the data before making a decision on the right percentage.

8. What actions or measures beyond increasing affordable housing would you take to advance racial equity and promote an inclusive Newton?

To advance racial equity and promote an inclusive Newton I recommend financial mentoring including workshops to help people increase their credit scores. Include monetary incentives for those who finish the classes like opening bank account and depositing \$500. Increasing fiscal independence will increase the likelihood that residents could qualify for an apartment and even home ownership.

9. What actions/changes would you support on the City Council to implement the recommendations of the Climate Action Plan?

It's so important for the city and the planet that we implement the recommendations of the Climate Action Plan to become carbon neutral by 2050. This includes:

- Requiring “green” standards on all new developments including solar panels, electric vehicle chargers, electric heat and cooking, and passive house standards.
- Adding .02 to FAR if a house is built to passive house standards with electric heat
- Protecting and expanding tree canopy and green space
- Writing stronger ordinances to incentivize residents/developers from cutting down trees
- Offering low interest loans for lower income residents to switch to electric heat pumps
- Adding electric car charging stations in the village centers

10. Do you support the current role of the City Council in issuing special permits? If not, what changes would you propose?

The City Council is an elected body accountable to the voters. An appointed group is not. There are places where we can streamline the special permit process, but we are far better off with a public process decided by an elected body.

11. Use this space to add anything you have not mentioned and that you would like us to know about your experience, vision for Newton, etc. (150 words or fewer)

Newton is a great city, but it can always strive to be better. We should incorporate our climate goals in everything we do including incentivizing passive house standards, to adding more electric car charging stations to adding bike lanes when repaving streets. Increasing green space and tree

canopy, especially in heat islands/village centers is so important. I can feel the difference when riding my bike on a leafy street to riding in any village center. We need to do more with storm water management. After a recent storm I was sandbagging at the Greater Boston Chinese Cultural Association, trying to keep water from flooding their basement again. Opening some of the brooks that are underground is a start. Adding rain gardens for stormwater management in public and private parking lots would help. Ensuring stormwater stays on a property. These are just a few ideas to incorporate as Newton grows.