



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?

Climate action, local business stabilization in village centers during the pandemic, and affordable housing.

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

Every resident in the city should be able to safely walk to (or if unable to walk then fully access by other means) a nearby village center and have all their typical needs met – groceries, restaurants, haircuts, medical treatment, convenience items, etc. – and find public spaces to socialize and form a sense of community. One thing necessary to make all of this possible is enough people living within the village centers themselves to provide a stable customer base for such businesses, and the other big thing is making sure people can walk from longer distances safely.

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

The biggest barriers to vibrant village centers in Newton are astronomical commercial rents by absentee commercial landlords and physical/geographic inaccessibility to customers and employees. We need policies to pressure

commercial landlords to promote longterm commercial tenancy over longterm vacancies, and we need to continue redesigning our village centers for walkability, outdoor socialization, ADA accessibility, and transit options.

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 have been a consistent supporter of these projects, although I don't think I really ever weighed in on the ones that went through the 40B/ZBA process instead of the City Council. I was only in office to vote on Riverside and my main focus there was maintaining the number of affordable units.

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

As noted in answer 3, we can only address this question by talking about commercial rents, which are through the roof. They are artificially high and every other cashflow problem local businesses face tends to run through that baseline problem. For example, wages need to be able to rise to attract workers, but they are constrained by rents. We also need village center housing that supports a customer base and worker base for these local businesses.

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

I have supported a proposal for a special permit zoning category in village centers geared specifically toward 100% low-income mid-sized projects eligible for federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit financing, as a parallel track to our recent approaches that have focused on cross-subsidies with high-price market units or senior-only specialized housing on the periphery. These tracks all need to be pursued together for a well-rounded city portfolio.

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

Probably 35% but would consider 50%. I think the current policy isn't really achieving the full set of goals it was intended to facilitate in the first place.

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

I've supported exploring a municipal banking mandate (depending on state reforms) to help the city either publicly or semi-privately finance (among other things) minority homeownership and small business ownership. I am also the leading Council voice for a comprehensively new vision of a reconstructed Public Safety Department for an inclusive and racially equitable Newton.

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

I always advocate for acceleration of the timetable for climate objectives in any plan on the subject, and I think the city needs to do more to stop gas utility malfeasance. Gas leaks are a huge danger in Newton, and the utilities rip up our new roads without even making us safer. I also don't think Electric Vehicles should be emphasized so heavily because we need walkability and transit instead of so much car-centric planning.

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

A lot of time gets taken up by minor permits related to slightly modifying one home at a time, and this is time that could be better spent deliberating on major project permits, instead. That would be better for our democratic process anyway, and it would save homeowners unnecessary expenses. So, those minor aspects ought to be removed from the Council's assignments. I also think we need a more tightly constrained calendar on major permit deliberation cycles because a lengthy and drawn-out process creates prohibitive costs for applications, which results in very expensive mega-projects being the only viable applications, while crowding out more modest, mid-sized projects, which could be more affordable to residents. Let's integrate public and planning feedback and then get to yes/no votes in a timely manner.

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)

I am seeking re-election to my second term as the Ward Councilor for Ward 5, and I think I have provided a unique voice on housing and economic development issues that comes at these matters from a different angle than just about everyone else on

the City Council. I think that perspective has been valuable to the deliberative process and has served my Ward 5 constituents well. I also communicate at great length on my views on complicated policy debates in a newsletter published almost every week for my constituents, which I hope people find helpful. I look forward to serving in the future.