



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?

- Pandemic recovery- including but not limited to small business recovery, getting kids safely back to school and making sure the residents are ok. Strengthening our infrastructure- roads, schools, municipal buildings, and well-being services for our residents
- Zoning redesign
- Global Warming-Fulfilling the City's climate action plan

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

The Key elements of a vibrant village center is creating a center that is welcoming to walkability (wide safe sidewalks), offers public transit (not completely dependent on cars) has a mix of restaurants, shops and services, public gathering spaces that includes public art, and housing that is accessible at several different price points to attract a mix of folks.

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

To obtain the outlined elements of a vibrant village is complex. I would start with zoning re-design that encourages density in village centers, (specifically thinking in Ward 6 allow our 2 village centers to go up to 3 stories by right) (*density of mixed use development) and reduce parking minimums encouraging public transit, walking and biking.

Invest in our infrastructure to maintain and enhance our public green spaces- we have a unique opportunity with ARPA funds to make one-time investments to significantly enhance our public spaces. We also had recent success with local grants to support pop-up opportunities in our retail spaces, and I lead on coordinating and raising funds to build platforms for outdoor dining. Finally, Newton Community Pride under the leadership of Gloria Garvis is doing an amazing job facilitating art in outdoor spaces- creating a sense of community and vibrancy-we need to fund and support more of that.

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.

Yes-

During my time on the Council, I have been an outspoken advocate on housing and voted on every project that has come before me to support affordable projects, mixed use housing and projects that will help to diversify the economic price points in Newton.

The only project I did not support was the Crescent St. project-as the price per unit was unsustainable, in part, because the project was not dense enough for the space, and the City was essentially the developer- which was not sustainable long term.

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

This is tricky in Ward 6 as many of the buildings in the village centers are family owned and have been owned for many years- thus there is no incentive to lower rents per say by the landlords.

The other challenge is the changing landscape of retail, only exacerbated by the pandemic. There are certain things people shop for online- and certain things folks shop for in person. The reason why services have been so successful in our village centers (nails, hair, dry-cleaning) is because those are things folks still need to do in person.

As previously mentioned, we have seen significant success with the local grant programming to pop-ups and new businesses. It's a great start, but not sustainable long-term. This is a complex problem- but as a start I would recommend the following:

- Zoning for increased density in our Village Centers to increase foot traffic/shoppers
- Support our restaurants and outdoor dining- statistically people come to our village centers to eat, stay to shop
- Educate our constituency on the importance of shopping local- and the impact on our village centers.
- Work with the City's economic development director to survey the city to determine what things people buy online and what they prefer to purchase in person, and outreach to small business and connect them with vacant spaces in Newton

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

I would advocate we use every tool in the toolbox and not limit ourselves. This includes, enforcing our inclusionary zoning ordinance and pushing developers to go as far as financially feasible in any large housing project to include permanently deeded moderate, low and very low-income units. Be careful stewards of our CPA funding ensuring the money is allocated for projects that fit within the legislated guidelines, open space, historic and affordable housing. I have voted against CPA projects that do not meet these guidelines. Support non-profit development projects that result in affordable units and take advantage of opportunities on the city level that present themselves as 100% affordable (recently, the Armory). Finally, I support the affordable housing trust that is currently working its way through the Council.

It is important to note that any true proponent of affordable housing would use every tool in the toolbox and not limit the work in any way. When you restrict yourself to any one mechanism to obtain affordable housing it truly calls into question one's commitment to affordable housing.

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

The current policy sets aside 70 percent of affordable units for residents, people who work for the city and public schools, employees of local businesses, and families with children in the city's schools. I agree with the analysis that this further perpetuates a racist housing system that gives significant preferential access to white households, while drastically limiting opportunities for people of color to move to Newton.

I would be comfortable reducing local preference to 25%.

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

In addition to increasing affordable housing units-

- Be an active voice on Police reform- ensuring the recommendations of the Police Task force are implemented- and that they go far enough.

- Within my role on the City Council- review all our policies and votes and how they may/may not impact people of color- in my experience people want to put racism in a bucket- that it only impacts one or two things, or that “policies can’t be racist,” or “zoning can’t be racist” – In my experience- anything and everything can be racist and needs to be reviewed with that lens.
- Finally, I would continue my commitment to having courageous conversations. I am continually surprised that the area I take on the most heat in my role as a City Councilor is when I talk about race-

I reference Dr. King’s “Letters from A Birmingham Jail.”

I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens’ Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action”; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a “more convenient season.” Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

It is clear that when I discuss race/racism I take on the most criticism as a City Councilor from being called divisive, accused of acting “unprofessional” receiving violent threats, or of being accused of making people feel bad. Despite all of this- I will continue to serve as an ally to the best of my ability and continue to take feedback from people of color on how I can do better.

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

I am prepared to advocate and move forward will all elements of the Climate action plan- time is of the essence to meet the following goals:

Everyone opts up to 100% renewable electricity with Newton Power Choice

33% of cars purchased are electric
30% of homes insulated to the max
16% of homes switch to electric heat pumps

I have co-docketed items that support the elements of the climate action plan as well as made changes in my personal life to support the climate action plan.

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

My concern about the current special permit process is the existing zoning code 85% of our homes are currently not in compliance, existing outside the approved zoning code. This requires most construction projects to go through a special permit process, creating an opening for inconsistency. Despite our best efforts as City Councilors, and the legal standards we apply to each project, my fear is that we are not always consistent with our review and approval, thus inadvertently creating a subjective process.

I would support zoning changes that include our current built environment and allow for more development by right that reflects our goals as a community.

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)

Thank you for considering my endorsement application and for all you do to make sure Newton is a welcoming City with a commitment to our environmental sustainability.