



## **Voters for a Vibrant Newton PAC 2021 City Mayoral Questionnaire**

Thank you for completing the 2021 Voters for a Vibrant Newton PAC mayoral candidate questionnaire. To submit your answers, email a PDF copy of this document with your answers by Wednesday, September 29th. Answers to this questionnaire will inform our endorsement decisions and will be posted online. Please limit each answer to 150 words.

**Candidate's Name:**   Ruthanne Fuller  

### **1. What are the three most important issues for the city to address in the next term?**

We must address many challenges in the next four years. Throughout the pandemic, my team has maintained our Triple A bond rating. With our financial strength and Federal ARPA monies, we have the tools and the leadership to make progress and build on what we've accomplished.

From our continued COVID recovery and investments in infrastructure to supporting our Public Schools and improving our school buildings while tackling development and zoning and addressing climate change and diversity, equity and inclusion, Newton is at a pivotal moment.

I will continue to invest in Newton's infrastructure. Over the past four years, we have invested \$150 million in our roads, sidewalks, parks, open space (including Webster Woods), and infrastructure. We will build a new Senior Center, Gath Pool, NECP, Lincoln-Eliot, Countryside and Franklin, athletic fields and more. We will lead on climate change and make meaningful progress on being an anti-biased, welcoming community.

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

Newtonville is a great example of what a vibrant village center is, especially now that I have a commitment from the MBTA to renovate the Newtonville Commuter Rail station. My administration invested in wide sidewalks, repaved roads, additional trees, bike lanes and bike share, benches, and public art. Walnut Street was redesigned to slow traffic intentionally to make it safer and more walkable. I voted for as a Councilor and supported as Mayor housing above businesses like MIDA, Caffe Nero and The Barn. Most importantly, there's 58 new permanently affordable homes.

Newtonville is designed around accessibility and sustainability with each project reflecting the input of residents. It includes wonderful historic buildings including the Masonic Temple. It's attracting retailers and restaurants with increased foot traffic they need to succeed. It will continue to be the home of the Senior Center mingling with students from NNHS, Cabot and Day.

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

Barriers to vibrancy in village centers include flawed commuter rail stations, the need for City investment, and the high rents for businesses with too little foot traffic.

The flawed designs of our Commuter Rail stops in Auburndale, West Newton, and Newtonville has meant our single platform stations are often bypassed by trains and they're inaccessible to those with disabilities, pushing a stroller, or carrying a suitcase. Working with our State legislators, Councilors, residents, and advocacy groups, I have successfully pressured the MBTA to commit to redesigning all three.

I've invested in wider sidewalks, more benches and tables, and better lighting to attract shoppers. We are working to update our zoning to allow smaller, lower rent stores with housing above so local businesses can afford to open. From City Hall, I'm helping businesses find employees with Newton Hires, fill vacant storefronts with Project Pop-Up, and attract diners with Newton Al Fresco.

**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, and if so, what have you done to support or oppose these projects? Please detail your thinking and your actions for each project.**

I have consistently supported mixed use developments and shaping them to meet Newton's goals of housing affordability, housing diversity, quality design, vibrancy, liveability and sustainability. I voted in favor of all those listed above that came before me during my time as a City Councilor.

I came out strongly for Northland, an excellent project, when it came to a referendum and made sure our Planning staff provided all the information and analysis both to make sure Dunstan East and Riverdale lined up with what we want and to move zoning reform forward. For the first time in Newton's history, I also insisted that both the Northland and Riverside developers financially supported the Countryside and Williams Elementary schools. As Mayor, I have prioritized listening to our residents and advocating for changes from developers to meet our needs. That's why the Councilors voted unanimously for the recent special permit for Riverside.

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

We're supporting shops and restaurants already here while making Newton attractive for new and diverse entrepreneurs.

I authorized \$610,000 in 50+ grants to assist small businesses across all our village centers through the pandemic.

We partnered with local entrepreneur Allison Yee for Project Pop-Up to bring innovative start-ups, most of which are women and minority owned, to vacant storefronts. We extended Project Pop Up through 2021, and look forward to many finding permanent homes in Newton.

We are updating our City purchasing guidelines to encourage minority owned companies to do business here, while working with the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts to assist and attract minority owned businesses.

We can redesign our zoning to reduce the size and rent of storefronts to make the spaces more affordable, creating opportunities for independent, diverse businesses to open here.

NewtonHires is attracting the unemployed/underemployed to work here helping locally owned businesses.

**6. How would you use housing tools to further economic and racial equity in Newton, specifically for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) For example, would you change the percentage of local preference in affordable housing lotteries?**

Housing is a fundamental right. As Mayor, I am committed to creating more diverse, affordable housing options for all types of households to move to and stay in Newton. I am proud we assisted some 250 households in the past year with emergency assistance so they stayed current on rent and remained at home during this pandemic. I am also proud that on Monday we took possession of the West Newton Armory which will be transformed into 100% permanent affordable housing near public transportation and employment opportunities.

One of my first investments of Newton's \$63 million ARPA monies is a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment to help us meaningfully meet the needs of our low-income residents and \$1M for helping keep people in their homes.

We are also working with City Councilors to reduce the 70% "local preference" on affordable housing to diversify those who can move in.

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

Growing up in Detroit, my childhood was forged in the crucible of race and inequality. Yet, systemic racism and unconscious bias still surrounds us so systemic change is essential.

My administration is working tirelessly to institutionalize Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

When I became Mayor, I created the position of Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion with the goal that everyone who lives, works, or visits Newton feels welcome and respected. We're redesigning Newton's biased City Seal, intentionally increasing diversity on our boards and commissions, focusing on fair, just and respectful policing, and supporting our Black, Asian, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ+ and underrepresented communities, and will provide more translating. I built \$250,000 into our budget for meaningful DEI actions. Unconscious bias training for department heads and City Councilors is underway. We're changing our procurement process to increase diversity with our vendors, and our decisions on new cannabis businesses emphasize equitable partnerships.

**8. What actions/changes would you support to implement the recommendations of the Climate Action Plan?**

With a lot of help from experts on staff and among our residents, we developed and are implementing Newton's first ever comprehensive Climate Action Plan focusing on:

- Insulation/weatherization
- Solar installations & Newton Power Choice with renewable energy accounting for 80% of electricity
- Heat pumps for heating/cooking/hot water
- Electric vehicles

We're making progress and Newton is a leader in the Commonwealth on climate action. Soon the City will complete its 30th solar installation, more than any other municipality in Massachusetts -- providing 40% of the City's electricity. We provided grants to install over 100 heat pumps in homes across Newton. We hired a first in the Commonwealth Energy Coach to help residents and businesses to make climate progress. Bike lanes, bike share, NewMo, commuter rail station upgrades: transportation is becoming more climate friendly. We're designing an electrification ordinance so new development and major renovations use renewable electricity for energy.

**9. What steps would you take over the course of the next four years to ensure Newton's fiscal health both in the short and long term?**

Our schools and safety, our thriving residential neighborhoods and vibrant village centers, our environmental initiatives and infrastructure improvements - all the wonderful attributes of Newton rest upon the foundation of our financial strength.

In the short-term, we preserved that strength by reacting quickly to the pandemic. We reduced our FY2021 overall budget by \$18 million. We focused our resources on helping our people and our business while maintaining our strong financial position and triple-A bond rating.

We're investing our one-time ARPA funds to help us stabilize and recover as well as make Newton permanently more resilient, liveable, vibrant, inclusive and sustainable.

Long-term, we must ensure that two of today's challenges – pension and retiree health care costs – don't become tomorrow's crises. We will fully fund pensions in nine years and then address our health costs so that future Newtonians will inherit a Newton even stronger tomorrow than it is today.

**10. 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 promised four years ago that Newton would meet the moment, and we did, even in this crisis. In the last four years, we instituted full day Kindergarten, designed our new Senior Center, created and expanded NewMo, and saved Webster Woods. I listened carefully and communicated frequently. During the crisis, I led with a steady hand and compassionate heart.

More work is ahead, and we're taking concrete steps to fulfill our values of a Newton that is more inclusive and welcoming. We're prioritizing funding for our school's and our city's critical needs, investing in our roads, sidewalks, parks, open spaces, athletic fields and infrastructure. We're focusing on building complete streets and sidewalks with more bike lanes to support multimodal transportation. We're moving forward with better buildings for our pre-school, Lincoln-Eliot, Horace Mann, Countryside and Franklin to help keep Newton Public Schools among the best in the nation.