



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?

- 1. Zoning Reform**
- 2. Pandemic recovery**
- 3. Improvement of our City's transportation infrastructure**

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

A vibrant village center is a place pulsating with life and activity where people want to live, shop, visit and work. The key elements are:

-Mixed- use residential development that encourages multi-generational and multi-cultural community development by providing smaller housing units usually over commercial space.

- Available and accessible public transportation and pedestrian and bicycle safe and friendly routes with bike sharing and bike parking stations

- Diverse and locally owned businesses**
- Clean and safe environment which includes greenspaces, trees and public gathering places for recreation and cultural events**
- Historic preservation of important village features to offer a sense of place and uniqueness**

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

Parking minimums and the scarcity of parcels of land within a village center that would currently allow for mixed- use development are barriers to a vibrant village both of which can be remedied through zoning reform. Another barrier is the lack of efficient and convenient public transportation. The solution would need to be a collaborative effort between the city and state to rectify.

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 Mixed-use developments. The approval of Austin Street and Trio were approved before my time on the council but I would have supported them. As a Land Use Committee member I have been through the approval process from the very beginning for both Northland and Riverside. Each will be vibrant, attractive live/work communities that will offer a variety of housing options, retail, restaurants, workspace and outdoor amenities. These projects will provide increased tax revenue to the city and will be constructed using more sustainable building design and practices to fight climate change. Riverdale is a 40B project here in Ward 1 which I strongly supported. This mixed-use development will revitalize an underdeveloped area of Ward 1 and will provide 51 units of affordable housing along with transportation related improvements in the neighboring streets and enhancements to the nearby park.

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

The Mayor and her team at the Economic Development office have initiated programs to encourage more diverse and locally owned businesses. I support Project: Pop Up which offers subsidies to spur innovation and entrepreneurship locally. Also Newton Alfresco allows our city's eateries to use parking spaces in front of their establishments as dining areas to support them as they try to remain in business during the pandemic.

The Charles River Regional Chamber is an invaluable asset to our business community. In partnership with the Chamber the city has and will create opportunities for new businesses and support them as they thrive in our city. As the ward councilor I have been an active advocate and promoter of businesses in Nonantum and Newton Corner with frequent referrals, social media posts and support when needing help with licensing and permitting. Knowing that this type of support is available to potential business owners will be an encouragement to locate their business here 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)?

Racial inequalities have manifested in our society in many ways--wealth gap, poverty rates, health access, housing patterns and educational and professional opportunities. One way to address this is by providing access to truly affordable housing and affordable possibilities for home ownership in our city. With smart reform of land use and zoning regulations we will promote diverse housing in TOD locations. These units will most likely be smaller and thus more available to those affected by economic and racial inequality. For example, removing the parking minimums in these areas would potentially encourage less car ownership and allow for more income to be used for housing, investments and the building of wealth. I am a strong supporter of the Housing Choice Zoning amendments signed by Gov. Baker this past January which includes --simple majority votes for certain zoning amendments and special permits, multi-family housing zoning by right in MBTA communities, and reduced parking requirements for residential developments in the special permit process. This Act will help provide economic relief to those affected by racial inequality. In addition I support the creation of an affordable housing trust in Newton. The housing trust

would allow the city to set aside money to purchase property or invest in development of affordable housing. This is another housing tool to further racial and economic equity.

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

I'm still undecided about this issue. On one hand I see the 70 % local preference as a real selling point of a project to abutting neighbors especially if they are opposed to the project. On the other hand I understand that there would most likely be an increase in the number of minorities who could obtain affordable units. I agree with the goal of increasing racial diversity in our city but I worry if the percentage is lowered to an extreme that this may yet be another reason why neighbors would oppose a project. Resulting in a project that may be denied and never built therefore with no additional affordable units made available. Another concern is that if the percentage of local preference is too low, minority residents who live and/or work in Newton may be at a disadvantage in getting an affordable unit in their own town. At this point I am unsure on the exact percentage there should be. I need to examine the details more before making my decision.

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

I believe the first step would be to continue to have conversations with leaders of the BIPOC an LGBTQ+ communities to hear directly from them what they would want to see and have happen to advance racial equity in our city. These leaders would best know how to direct the City Council and the Mayor's office in implementing appropriate and effective policies to promote inclusivity. I would continue to follow their lead.

Since these groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic I support the Mayor's proposal to use ARPA funds for a community needs assessment particularly focused on the needs of our lower-resourced residents to ensure that programming responds to their specific concerns and promotes economic stability.

I would support the hiring of a DE&I (diversity, equity and inclusion) manager to implement DE&I initiatives, such as diversifying the composition of city employees.

The Charles River Regional Chamber has also made a strong commitment to supporting DE&I--"We believe businesses and nonprofits should foster workplace and customer environments that provide equal access and equity of opportunity through the intentional inclusion of all." Similar resolutions from the City Council regarding city employees will reinforce our declaration that Newton is a welcoming city. As a city councilor I will continue to support all within the city. I support everyone having a voice and being represented both in city government and our workforce.

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

I am a strong supporter of the city's Climate Action Plan for the city to become carbon neutral by 2050. Currently the City Council is considering a Home Rule Petition for electrification in the city. If approved this would require new construction to be built with fossil free heating, hot water and cooking systems. In addition to the city's initiatives like Newton Power Choice, solar installations, EV charging stations, and the replacement of the city's fleet with electrical vehicles (all of which I supported), I would support and encourage that the building of future public buildings be constructed using the latest most up to date sustainable methods and designs. Key to addressing the climate crisis is to have homes and businesses built along transit corridors so that folks can work and live in areas where a car is less necessary, minimizing traffic congestion and sprawl.

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

I do support the role of the City Council in issuing special permits. Having been on the Land Use committee for the past 3 years I have seen first hand how the collaborative process between the public, the committee members and Planning have resulted in much better projects than were originally proposed. Often through this process more greenspace is added or preserved, better

sustainable construction is implemented and surrounding transportation improvements are made. Consequently, there is less opposition to the project and the city therefore benefits with more housing and added amenities. However, I do believe that small, de minimis building projects like adding dormers or mud rooms and perhaps accessory apartments do not need to go through Land Use. They can be handled administratively.

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)
After last Spring's contentious and divisive special election my vision and hope for Newton is one in which together we can foster a spirit of collaboration and cooperation as we confront some difficult city policy decisions and navigate through this horrendous pandemic. I pledge as a resident and a councilor to be an agent of this accord. Only in this way can we reach our shared goal of the betterment and prosperity of our city.