



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?**

* **help residents, workers, and businesses emerge and transition post-Covid19** - we need to ensure health, safety and comfort through policies and conditions (eg. interior air quality in city and school buildings), assist those struggling with housing and food insecurity, help protect students and staff in schools, encourage economic stability, viability and development for residents and businesses, improved roadway and sidewalk

access and safety.

* **augment the welcoming and open nature of Newton**- encouraging village center vitality, mixed uses with retail, office, and housing in a variety of types, sizes and locations, more commercial and lab science uses for both employment opportunities and tax revenue, advocate for racial and social justice, mental health and addiction support services and programming, transparency in local government (eg. an improved city website with workable links to current and past docket items ongoing, City Councilor voting records, etc.)

* **environmental sustainability**- climate change demands that we take action in many ways: our built structure and infrastructure need to aim for a zero carbon emissions goal through LEED and Passive House standards, alternative energy sources, choices of building materials and methods offer better solutions, less use of SOV, more walkability and bike-ability for those able, products safer for our air and water should be used to maintain our parks and athletic fields, promote native plant and pollinator-friendly plant materials for public and private landscaping, continue to strive to reach Newton's Climate Action Plan goals and new programs such as textile recycling.

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

* **a mix of uses supporting and relying on each other 24 hours a day** – a combination of street retail and restaurants, with office and residential above in village centers and/or near public transportation is a way to ensure vitality and safety. Safe streets, sidewalks, cross walks, and signalization is key in a village center (as everywhere in Newton!). Being able to adapt and adjust to changing uses over time helps support economic vitality and success.

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

* **Opposition to buildings being over 1 or 2 stories high** is a main barrier to village center vibrancy and development. Opposition to adding more height, housing and density is an obstacle to village vibrancy. Maintaining the current parking minimums for sites that are transit oriented and walkable also is an impediment. How to overcome these? Education (rinse and repeat), advocacy, updated zoning ordinances, outspoken support by the Mayor, City Council, relevant boards and commissions, and department heads.

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 **supporter of all these specific proposals**, and for mixed-use development for over 30 years. Both from my professional background and training as a landscape architect and site planner, combined with my lived, real-life experience, I have a broad view based in comprehensive planning, urban design and city planning combined with best-practices gleaned from past and current plans country wide and globally. I chaired the LWVN Land Use and Housing Committee, am a member MAPC, and many other professional organizations that stay abreast of this topic. I have advocated for all these proposals.

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

* As a member of the Charles River Regional Chamber I join the effort to support existing and new locally owned businesses to thrive. I coordinate with local businesses to promote shop/buy/eat local, collaborate with city staff eg. Economic Development Director, EDC, Planning Dept. to encourage local businesses to come, stay, succeed here. As a Councilor, I commit not only to our city's residents, but to our businesses too. I applaud the Chamber's initiative for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). Personally I have a desire to support local, small and independent businesses, while welcoming larger life sciences and other businesses into Newton, as those help provide employment and tax revenue.

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

* Newton's various FORJ groups are an enormous resource, and their goals should be acknowledged by the School Department, School Committee, City Council and Planning initiatives Establishing a Housing Trust Fund, partially using CPA funding for that, promoting the state Housing Choice law, adding equity to the Newton's Comprehensive Plan, join with other nearby communities to collectively act on housing issues via Abundant Housing MA, and YIMBY organizations will help us access collective resources.

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

* The “Local Preference” model sets aside housing in new projects with affordable units to 70%. I hear from current, not to mention past, residents who can’t stay in Newton, solely based on income. Individual stories are compelling: people have raised families, worked in Newton as mail carriers, at Newton Wellesley Hospital as social workers and administrators, seniors, who can’t stay here for financial reasons such as their apartments being sold or rent being increased beyond their means. Their connections are here, family, friends. I believe that lessening but not eliminating local preference is the way to go. I acknowledge the lack of racial diversity and past exclusionary practices, but don’t believe keeping current low income residents out is the solution. Adding a prioritization system to local preference that would give advantage to BIPOC is worth consideration.

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

* Families Organizing for Racial Justice (FORJ) promotes inclusion and diversity in Newton, its schools and the community at large. Their efforts include rights and access for Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander and all residents. I am in alignment with their goals to support kids, speak out about injustice, take action to address bias and inequity. This is a group that should be embraced and listened to, as their goal is comprehensive and applies to schools, housing and overall community. I connect with them through several elementary school-based groups, and encourage everyone to learn more and join them. I urge the City to collaborate more with FORJ and to embrace their goals as all of our’s.

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

* Every day, every week, every project I look to see how it/we can align with Newton’s Climate Action Plan. Be it solar, reducing waste, using less energy, changing to zero carbon based fuels, fixing and reducing gas leaks, embracing Passive House standards, looking at renewable and alternative energy sources for public and private uses, use of native plant materials and pollinator friendly plants, I am in 100% agreement with this plan.

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

* As Vice Chair of the Land Use Committee that votes on Special Permits this is a subject close to me. The Special Permit process is an important component of Newton's land use process; over 90% of our buildings are out of compliance with current zoning codes, given they were built before zoning ordinances existing. It can help owners who don't have the ability to make changes by-right. However, there are a lot of small proposals coming before the City Council that could well be handled internally by Planning staff, such as porch or front step set backs. There is a micro-management aspect to these small proposals that I believe could well be served in-house by professional staff.

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)

Attitudinal perspective is very important in a well functioning city body. The contentiousness and bullying many of us experience is present in the public and on the City Council. My multi-issue, collaborative, listening, responsible and civil point of view is more important now than ever.

submitted at 2:31 pm Mon. Sept. 6, 2021 to VVN2021questionnaire@gmail.com