



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) Infrastructure – We need safe roads, sidewalks, good lighting, a healthy tree canopy, and regular athletic field maintenance.
- 2) Zoning – We have spent years engaged in a divisive effort to completely rewrite our zoning code and have little to show for it. It is time to work together to tackle specific zoning issues, including measures to discourage teardowns, make our construction more environmentally friendly and sustainable, and improve the business districts in our village centers.
- 3) Environment – We must focus on Newton’s climate action plan and transportation needs within Newton. It’s especially important to work on better public transit. Let’s set an example for the rest of Massachusetts.

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

Our city government needs to provide the foundation and infrastructure for our villages. If the tone the city sets is inviting, in terms of infrastructure, businesses will follow. We need nice streetscapes; trash cans that are clean, easy to empty, and well maintained; crosswalks that make it easy to cross the street; well-lit walkways and sidewalks;

comfortable and attractive benches; picnic tables; and lots of trees and plantings. Additionally, civic open space/gathering space is a must. The space created in Newtonville between Cafe Nero and Starbucks is a great example of that.

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

Our city has an important role in getting, keeping, and encouraging thriving village centers. We have great villages in Newton, and they could be much better. We must talk directly with our business owners. City Hall needs to be user-friendly for our business community. All of our villages must benefit from the support our city government could provide (see above).

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.

Mixed-use developments should be welcome in our city. They are important projects and it's imperative that these projects are carefully vetted. Is each project transit-oriented? Is each one designed to be in scale to abutting neighbors? The job of the city council is to scrutinize to get the best possible projects.

Riverside is an example of how mixed-use developments have the potential to be a positive benefit to our community. It was carefully vetted with neighbors, promotes a variety of housing, sits next to a major highway; and takes a site that was not well used and is transforming it.

Austin Street was a missed opportunity to create 100% affordable housing.

As a Councilor I will judge each project independently, on its merits.

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

We must continue to create village centers that are thriving. Our city needs to take the lead and advocate for the local businesses we want. Creating welcoming village centers will be better for all businesses. We must reach out proactively to our local businesses and make it easy to deal with various offices in City Hall.

Additionally, let's be mindful of the businesses we currently have, and as we do construction in village centers let's ensure they don't suffer. Let's vigorously engage in efforts to help these businesses so they can operate while we continue to bring in new stores.

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

There is no single answer to this question. At the city level, we need to explore a variety of options including increasing home-ownership opportunities (perhaps community land trusts), not just rentals. We must increase inclusionary zoning for larger projects and reduce the local-preference percentage (see below). But as a community, we need intense discussion on how to achieve this goal.

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

There are competing concerns here. On one hand, we want to use our limited supply of affordable housing to benefit Newton residents; on the other hand, by reducing the local preference we are likely to increase the diversity of our population. Therefore, I favor reducing the local preference; however, I want to hear a vigorous discussion before I commit to a percentage.

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

Promoting racial equity and an inclusive Newton is not part of a single program or programs. It must be incorporated into our daily work. Our schools do that now and our city government is taking measures to start doing that. But there is more work to be done. We must continue to actively outreach to *all* members of our

community to make sure they feel welcome and included. This is work that needs to be done every day, in everything we do.

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

The city council has taken major steps to implement the climate action plan through zoning changes and other policies. I support the current effort before the City Council to require new and substantial renovations to convert to electrical; however, I am sensitive to the concerns of our local businesses and hospitals and want to ensure we craft a solution that will work for our community.

We must do everything we can to address climate change.

I support the addition of the Energy Coach, and would expand her role into working with residents on how to transition to solar panels and potentially car-charging ports at home.

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

I believe the city council plays an important and appropriate role in the special-permit process. Decisions about development should be made by elected officials who are *accountable* to the voters and have the ability to stand up to developers. We must also look at the special-permit process to make sure it is as efficient as possible. Perhaps some smaller residential projects could be handled in a streamlined administrative process, to ensure that our residents can move forward quickly with their plans.

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 care deeply about Newton. I grew up here. I attended the public schools and when the time came, I returned with my husband and sent my own kids to school here. City councilors must listen to the community and not impose their vision on our residents. I believe city councilors must listen and work with people of all opinions to create a diverse and welcoming city. I have the skill set to do this job, and am committed to using my skills to make Newton a better place.