



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 is a top priority for me because it has such an enormous impact on future development and because it is a critical tool in mitigating climate change.

2. Climate goals- A warming planet is the biggest threat to our future and we can see that the impacts are upon us now. It makes so much more sense to work to minimize the impacts of natural disasters rather than clean up after them. The impacts to the planet's ecosystems may at this point be irreversible, but there still hope to mitigate the worst impacts. We owe it to future generations to do everything we can to leave them a livable planet.

3. Infrastructure- Safe streets and sidewalks, maintaining and improving our underground utilities including water, sewer, stormwater and fixing leaky gas pipes are all very important to me, especially as Chair of Public Facilities.

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

A vibrant village center should include a variety of uses, comfortable and accessible outdoor public spaces and attractive squares or parks where people can linger. I like to see room for trees and green spaces. Essentially, it is a place that attracts people. It should include a mix of building uses, including ground floor retail stores with residential above. A mix of restaurants, cafes and small, independent retail shops is ideal. It should be accessible by bicycle and be safe for pedestrians as well as people who drive, but not dominated by expansive parking lots. Ideally, it should be accessible by public transit. Other things I like to see include public art, spaces for concerts, outdoor seating and streets that focus on the needs of people and not automobiles.

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

Our outdated zoning code is a real barrier. That is why it is so important to continue the work to update our zoning. We need to make it easier for people to rebuild or renovate both by right and through the special permit system. I would like to increase walkability and safe access by bicycle in all our village centers. This includes safe bike lanes, including protected bike lanes throughout the city. In addition, we should be working closely with the Economic Development Commission to attract new businesses to our villages. It is also important that we encourage owners of historic properties to preserve them whenever possible and have the historic commission be proactive in identifying significant properties so we continue to have our links to Newton's rich history.

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 supported all of the above mixed-use developments (Dunstan East and Riverdale are 40 B projects approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals).

My criteria for how I come to decision includes, but is not limited to the following:

Is the location appropriate for the amount of density proposed at the site? Is the development near public transit? Is it walkable to stores and amenities? Does it mitigate traffic impacts? Are the developers/architects using passive house design or high-performance building standards? Is it improving the built environment? Will this development help us meet our climate action goals? Will it improve stormwater impacts? Will it improve or create new public greenspaces? How many housing units will be built and how many are affordable?

I think Northland is one of the best projects we have ever approved because it checks all the boxes and goes above and beyond with its innovative design, energy efficiency and public benefits. It is transforming an ugly, underutilized parking lot and an unattractive strip mall into a lively mixed use and a highly energy efficient development. In a nutshell, it will improve the environment and provide 140 affordable housing units. If it was built today, it would be the largest passive house development in Massachusetts. It has a very thoughtfully designed transportation system, including a free electric shuttle. It limits parking and the location will be eminently walkable to stores, restaurants, cafes and to the village of Newton Highlands. It will actually improve the amount of greenspace and daylight parts of the South Meadow Brook. It also preserves the beautiful and historic Saco Pettee Mill building.

I am very happy how Austin Street has turned out. It was the first really significant mixed-use development since I was elected that added significantly to the number of affordable units in the city. I thought it was a great use of an underutilized parking lot and we still kept most of the public parking spaces. The residents of Austin Street are frequenting our local stores and we now have an attractive public space. I enjoy having my coffee on Bram Way Square which previously was a space devoted to cars. We also were able to underground the utilities and plant more street trees.

Riverside is another outstanding project that meets my criteria. It will meet high energy efficiency standards and dramatically improve stormwater runoff into the Charles River. It includes space for biotechnology companies which will result in significant tax revenue for the city. Right on the Green line, it is the perfect TOD.

Riverdale is transforming a long vacant, one-story building and parking lot into a mixed-use building with affordable units and it will improve public access to the Charles River Path and all the amenities the river offers. I think it will be a huge improvement for the neighborhood and help our local independent businesses on the California Street corridor. It is across the street from a supermarket, a pharmacy and a gym and a short walk to the Downtown Express buses and the 71 bus which has great service to Harvard Square and connections to the Red Line. Riverdale will be a great place to live and help us move the needle on climate impacts and reduce stormwater impacts to the Charles River.

Trios has included significant housing options for new residents including younger people, families and older adults seeking to downsize. It's another good example of a TOD being adjacent to transit and very walkable to amenities.

Dunstan East is looking to be another promising development that will offer more housing choices, including affordable units. It will also improve public spaces and daylight a portion of Cheesecake Brook.

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

The creation of a working group made up of elected officials and economic development committee (EDC) members to kick around some ideas would be a start. Can we give a bonus to developers for renting to a locally owned business as opposed to a chain? "Buy Local" campaigns have been effective. Let's do more of them. People need reminders that local businesses often hire local people which strengthens our local economy. Shopping locally may also mean you can leave your car parked and do errands on foot or bicycle. I have heard that for every \$100 spent locally \$48 is reinvested in the local economy.

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

Reducing the local preference is one tool. Allowing more multifamily buildings to be built by right in the city is another. I favor modest sized housing units, which by definition are more affordable. In particular, I am a fan of the triple deckers, which once were a key component to create affordable housing for new immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th century. Though Newton does not have a lot of them they do exist here and I think they can rise again as we look at ways to create more middle scale housing. Those of us on the city council can do our part by allowing them, if not throughout the city, then in many parts of the city, particularly near and around village centers. We must be sure to encourage innovative design and construction methods and work on new financing models that are targeted towards people and families with modest incomes. Diversifying our housing supply can help diversify our city.

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

I am not wedded to a specific number. But at least 50% would be reasonable.

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

The mayor's most recent newsletter described an effort working on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) initiatives that look promising. There is also a terrific incubator idea called project Pop Up which supports micro and small businesses and underrepresented groups and minority owned entrepreneurs. This project is a collaboration between businesses and artists with a grant from Ma Division of Economic Development. Local businesses are key economic diversity and to keep village centers vibrant and storefronts interesting.

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

Almost 90% of GHG emissions in Newton come from residential and commercial buildings and from the transportation sector. These are the areas that require our full attention. I am currently working on a Home Rule petition that would allow the city to require the electrification of new buildings and significant redevelopments (with some exemptions not yet decided). I am in favor of any actions that would increase/encourage more biking, walking, and use of shuttles and public transit, while reducing single-occupancy vehicle trips. I will advocate for more energy-efficient and climate-smart buildings in both by right and special permits and use our zoning rules to require and/or incentivize high-efficiency performance, such as Passive House and/or net-zero new construction. I support EV charging stations in all our public spaces, more dedicated bike lanes. I am also concerned about the large number of natural gas leaks all over the city. Methane is a potent green house gas and also many of these leaks are a threat to street trees. I would use my role as chair of Public Facilities to expedite gas leak repairs.

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

I would propose a tiered process where only the most significant special permits (on the scale of Riverside and Northland) come before the Land Use Committee. A less politicized administrative review process would be appropriate for smaller scale projects.

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)

My vision is for Newton to be a more welcoming and affordable city for people with a range of incomes. My vision is for carbon-neutral Newton by or before 2050. I want to see a city that has electrified vehicles, homes, and appliances. I would like to see thriving transit-oriented neighborhoods and business districts and a robust, electrified public transit system. I want to be able to get on my bike and ride safely and confidently through Newton on dedicated bike lanes and have a lot of company while doing it. I would like every neighborhood to have streets lined with healthy, mature trees and for our public parks to have dedicated spaces for pollinator gardens. This vision will benefit every Newton resident and contribute to

reduced energy costs, reduced traffic congestion, improved air quality and improved overall public health.