

# 2021 Boston Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

## John Barros

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### **(A) Your Candidacy**

#### **1. What would be your top three priorities if elected to serve?**

- A strong and equitable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.
- Making housing more affordable.
- Improving our public education system.

#### **2. What qualifies you to hold this office?**

I've dedicated my life to serving Boston. As Executive Director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, I led the historic transformation of the Dudley neighborhood, establishing the country's largest urban community land trust. As Boston's Chief of Economic Development, I led the effort to bring 140,000 good jobs to Boston, while making record investments in job training, affordable housing, education, and climate action. I have decades of experience leading organizations and creating positive results for the community.

As a longtime community organizer, a father, and a small business owner, Boston's future means everything to me. I have a plan to bring Boston back from the COVID crisis in an equitable way. If elected, I will be the first Black man to serve as Boston's Mayor. I'm ready to address social inequities and make Boston more inclusive for immigrants, people of color, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

#### **3. What is the one policy you've seen pioneered in another city that you'd most like to see Boston adopt?**

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As Mayor I will join the Mayors for a Guaranteed Income coalition and work with business, philanthropy, and our institutions to bring a guaranteed minimum income program for Boston. Recent data from a pilot program in Stockton, California shows promising results, and recent federal actions with regard to direct payments to families in the coronavirus relief bill will provide the foundation needed to expand.

**4. Which of the following groups have you chosen to reject / would reject campaign contributions from: For-profit developers, Fossil fuel executives or lobbyists, Charter school advocates and lobbyists, Police officers?**

Fossil fuel executives or lobbyists.

**(B) Racial Equity & Community Engagement**

**1. Name three policy changes you've been able to accomplish to advance racial justice and/or equity in the city of Boston.**

- I established Boston's first Office of Economic Development, and a new Equity & Inclusion Unit, with an emphasis on supporting small businesses owned by women and POC. We created an Economic Development Center to bring small business resources and training to our neighborhoods.
- I created a well-documented framework that gave the City the legal grounding to set race- and gender- conscious goals in City contracting. As a result, Mayor Walsh signed an executive order that commits 25% of all City contracts to businesses owned by women and POC.
- I established the Office of Financial Empowerment, and recommended that the Mayor create the new Equity Cabinet to bring an equity lens to all functions of city government and launch a series of anti-racist trainings throughout the organization.
- I Co-chaired Imagine Boston 2030, a process which engaged 15,000 Boston residents. I started several neighborhood-level plans including Uphams Corner, promoting development without displacement.

**2. What steps would you take, if elected, to engage all the diverse communities of Boston in policymaking, and what past actions of yours should give voters confidence that you will follow through?**

Throughout my career, robust community engagement has been central to my work as a community organizer and City leader. As Executive Director of DSNI, I led several community organizing efforts, and engaging all of the diverse communities in the Dudley neighborhood was essential. The DSNI Board included 4 white, 4 African American, 4 Cape Verdean, and 4 Latino members, reflecting the demographics of the neighborhood.

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We always insisted on having similar diverse representation in all of our subcommittees and initiatives. As Chief of Economic Development, robust community engagement, including proactive outreach, culturally competent programming, and language access was important to me, especially in empowering local small businesses.

As Mayor, I will assemble the most diverse cabinet in the City of Boston's history, and my team and I will work with local community groups to build relationships and trust with the community to ensure robust and meaningful community engagement.

**(C) Charter Reform & Balance of Power**

**1. What do you see as the role of the City Council in our strong-mayor system?**

The City Council plays a vital role in City government. Councilors engage with residents and ensure a more collaborative governing process through advocacy and legislation.

Over the past seven years, I worked closely with the City Council in order to develop policies that reflect the needs of Boston's neighborhoods.

**2. The City Council currently has very little ability to influence the budgeting process. Would you support legislation to enable line-item budgetary changes? YES/ NO**

No.

**3. Would you support Charter Change to allow for Ranked Choice Voting in Boston? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**4. Would you support changing the city charter to impose term limits for the office of Mayor in Boston? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**5. What, if any, other changes to the City Charter would you like to see?**

I would like the pronouns in the City Charter to be made fully inclusive to all of Boston's residents. Currently, the City Charter uses he/him pronouns throughout, when describing all elected and appointed positions. Of course, this is outdated, and the Charter should use they/them pronouns to include all Bostonians of all genders, and those outside the gender binary.

**(D) Revenue**

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**1. Do you support the PILOT Action Group's recommendations for a standing PILOT commission with community representation? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**2. Given state law, Boston is limited in its taxing power. What opportunities do you see for the city to raise revenue?**

- I see an opportunity to explore District Improvement Financing (DIF) and Tax Increment Financing (TIF), economic tools that promote redevelopment and implementation of neighborhood plan by use of public/private partnerships.
- I will continue to strengthen linkage and our Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP) to capture more value from new development which will be channeled into affordable housing and job training.
- I will continue to encourage the creation of Business Improvement Districts in order to generate millions of dollars that can be invested in parks and roads, local services and programs and maintenance of local infrastructure.
- I will also work with the State to establish more flexibility in this regard.

**(E) Education**

**1. What are your top priorities for reducing persistent racial and economic achievement gaps in the Boston Public Schools?**

- Help families of color and low-income families achieve the pre-conditions for school success by:
  - Creating integrated income, housing, and food supports to address non-academic barriers;
  - Developing a 0-5 early childhood system that expands the city's free UPK system and creates subsidy opportunities to affordably access high-quality childcare;
  - Equipping families with the digital connectivity, hard- and software and technical assistance they need to learn and connect to work and services.
- Add "opportunity variables and weights" to the Home-Based assignment system to further prioritize families who have been least likely to get their top choices.
- Eliminate curricular inequities across schools by creating a clearer mandate for all student learning and curating evidence-based curricula and tools for schools to activate the mandate.

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- Expand dual enrollment, early college, and career technical training in high schools beyond the exam schools.
- Create hiring incentives and post-hire supports that draw more educators of color to BPS.

**2. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools in Boston? YES/ NO**

No. I believe that every student should receive a high quality education that meets their needs. I support fully funding the Boston Public Schools, and I would also advocate for an improved State funding formula that does not pit district schools against charter schools. We should not expand charter schools until the State formula has been addressed. After that, we should be able to expand charter schools if our communities want them, without taking funding from the Boston Public Schools.

**3. Do you support a change in BPS governance to allow Boston voters the right to elect school committee members, like every other city in Massachusetts? YES/ NO If so, what would your ideal structure be? If not, why not?**

No. Going back to an elected school board has known pitfalls. It does not vastly improve representation, it increases the influence of money and political operatives in the school committee process and certainly does not increase community participation (and, therefore, democracy). I propose, instead, that the school committee have permanent subcommittees that include students, parents, and other community representatives as members. Standing committees might include budget, academic program, community engagement, and educational equity committees. This would be far more participatory, if not more democratic. Additionally, I would support the appointment of at least one additional student seat to the Boston School Committee. Student Committee members should be voting members and afforded the same or more resources than their adult peers, as appropriate, to perform their duties. These are important conversations we need to have together as a community.

**4. Do you support removing police from Boston public schools? YES/ NO**

Yes. We need to protect students' safety, while ending the school to prison pipeline. We expect too much from police. They are expected to be social workers, conflict mediators, mental health counselors, and more. What we train them for is a much more narrow field of work. We have seen – too often – is the results of this mismatched training. We need to augment the work of law enforcement with professionals who can do the work police are not equipped to do. Nowhere is this more apparent than in our schools, where students of color often get caught up in the criminal justice system for behavioral issues, when what they really need is more social-emotional support. I support reducing the number of police officers in our schools, and increasing guidance counselors, and bringing in more professionals who can serve young peoples' social-emotional needs.

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**5. Do you support making a permanent change to the admissions process for Boston's exam schools? YES/ NO And if so, what would your proposed alternative system be?**

Yes. Schools which provide more rigorous curricula need to take a more representative cross-section of the city and, more importantly, of the school district's population. We should create an assessment process that includes teacher recommendations, class rankings, along with GPA and an unbiased entrance exam. Right now, the entrance exam counts for 50% of the assessment process, and it should not be more than 20%.

**6. What steps would you take to make universal pre-K a reality in Boston?**

Prior to COVID, Boston had 2.5 times as many seats as 4YO and near the capacity needed to include all 3YO. Boston's challenge is that the seats are not free or of equal quality. Also, families are not taking full advantage of the 1K free seats created through the UPK initiative in the last three years. To expand participation and quality, I propose to:

- Launch a public education campaign to encourage full participation.
- Use a combination of COVID recovery dollars and city budget to grow the UPK system from a \$15M system to \$75M+ per year that includes all 3YO and 4YO.
- Continue expanding the UPK Connector system so families can choose the Pre-K provider settings AND BPS schools that work for them.
- Make grant funding available to early childhood providers that are not in the UPK system for them to invest in efforts to meet the City's quality standards.

**(F) Public Safety**

**1. Do you support requiring the police department and other city agencies to get City Council approval before acquiring new surveillance technologies or military equipment? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**2. Do you support the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office's do-not-prosecute list and expanded approach to dealing with such low-level offenses? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**3. Do you support ending information sharing between the Boston Police Department and ICE? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**4. Do you support closing the loopholes in Boston's Trust Act which allow BPD to inquire about immigration status or pass information along to ICE? YES/ NO**

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Yes.

**5. Do you support shuttering the Boston Police gang database? YES/ NO**

No.

**6. Would you support a hard cap on overtime for individual officers? If so, what percentage of an officer's salary? YES/ NO**

No.

**7. What changes to the 2017 Boston Police Patrolman's Association (BPPA) contract would you advocate for in the latest round of contract negotiations?**

- As Mayor, I will create a new City-run agency that is highly trained on safety measures, that responds to calls relating to mental health issues, public health issues, and behavioral issues in schools.
- When we do that, we can narrow the scope of the calls that police are expected to respond to, and formalize that in their contracts.
- I will also invest more money into local nonprofits and community orgs that do work around public safety, mental health, and social services. These community investments will also address the root causes of violence by alleviating poverty, creating better opportunities for young people, improving mental health in our communities, and helping people who are struggling with substance use.

**8. What current functions of the Boston Police Department should be transferred to agencies under civilian control, and what governance would you propose for them?**

I would like to see more investigations of police misconduct supervised under civilian control. The Office of Police Accountability and Transparency (OPAT) is an appropriate governing body.

As Mayor, I will create a new City-run agency that is highly trained on safety measures, that responds to calls relating to mental health issues, public health issues, and behavioral issues in schools. When we do that, we can narrow the scope of the calls that police are expected to respond to, and formalize that in their contracts.

**9. Would you advocate for the reallocation of money from the Boston Police Department budget to reinvestment in communities? YES/ NO *If so, how much?***

Yes. We expect too much from the police. We expect them to be conflict mediators, mental health professionals and more. This can have disastrous consequences, when

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they respond to a call they are not trained to handle. In 2020, I pushed for the reallocation of \$12M from the police overtime budget into community health and youth empowerment programs. As Mayor, I would take it further. I will reallocate more funds into local nonprofits and community orgs that do work around public safety, mental health, and social services. When we do that, we can narrow the scope of the calls that police are expected to respond to. These community investments will also address the root causes of violence by alleviating poverty, creating better opportunities for young people, improving mental health in our communities, and helping people who are struggling with substance use.

**10. Which of the following would you support banning the use of by the Boston Police Department: Tear gas and other chemical weapons, Rubber bullets, Attack dogs?**

Tear gas and other chemical weapons, Rubber bullets, Attack dogs. We need to get to a point where the police are not using any of these methods. We need to do more as a city to address the root causes of violence and crime, by investing in the local nonprofits that provide better opportunities for our youth, offer job training and financial empowerment resources, help the community with mental health, poverty alleviation, substance use issues, and more. Recognizing that crime will not disappear overnight, we need to find ways to demilitarize the police by transitioning to less and less lethal tools, until none of them are being used.

**11. Do you believe that affiliation or sympathies with white supremacist organizations among officers is a problem with BPD? YES/ NO If so, what measures would you take as mayor to combat that issue?**

Yes. We have reason to believe that a member of the Boston Police Department took place in the violent insurrection at the US Capitol in January. If true, this is a huge problem. Any member of the BPD with white supremacist ties needs to be thoroughly investigated, including a civilian review by the Office of Police Accountability and Transparency, and if the allegations are confirmed, they need to be removed from the force.

**12. Do you support safe consumption sites? YES/ NO**

Yes. I support safe consumption sites, which have been proven as an effective form of harm reduction. It's important that new safe consumption sites are created in tandem with additional wraparound services for people struggling with substance use disorders. Safe consumption sites need to be planned and sited as part of a continuum of care. We also need to recognize the adverse impact that the sites can have on quality of life for the surrounding community. We need to locate them in areas that don't compromise others community members' safety. We would need to have a thorough community process and conduct impact assessments to ensure that any impacts on the community are planned for, mitigated, and equitable.

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**(G) Environment & Transportation**

**1. Do you believe Boston needs to reduce its dependence on cars, and if so, how would you propose to do so?**

- Reducing Boston's dependence on cars is essential to our carbon reduction goals. As Mayor, I would prioritize increasing the quality and affordability of public transit, and active transportation options.
- Throughout my life and career, I have fought to improve Boston's public transit network by expanding service, especially in communities that are most affected by climate impacts: low income communities, immigrants communities, and communities of color. I have long been active in the work to expand the Fairmount Line, which is a vital resource for low-income and communities of color. We should make the T more affordable, not less, while developing creative solutions to fund much needed maintenance and expansion.
- As Mayor I would also work to expand our bike network significantly, including in our downtown core, main commuter corridors, and throughout our neighborhoods and Main Street districts.

**2. What are your top three policy priorities for making Boston a climate-resilient city, and how would you ensure that equity is at the center of any such efforts?**

- Mitigation: I will accelerate the City of Boston's carbon reduction goals and focus on cutting emissions in our biggest carbon-emitting sectors, especially buildings and transportation. I will work to strengthen the emissions standards of all new development, and build on programs like BERDO and Renew Boston Trust to help large building owners decarbonize existing buildings.
- Adaptation: I will accelerate our neighborhood level resilience planning through Climate Ready Boston and accelerate implementation in our most vulnerable neighborhoods in order to protect residents from climate impacts including flooding, storms, extreme heat, and power disruptions.
- Green Jobs: I will establish a Green Jobs team within our Office of Workforce Development. We need to make sure that our response to climate change is just and equitable. Responding to the crisis of climate change is not only our responsibility; it's also an opportunity to create thousands of jobs in emerging industries and prepare our residents for the careers of the future.

**3. Do you oppose the creation of new fossil fuel infrastructure in Boston? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**4. Do you support fare-free public transit? What steps would you take to achieve this goal? YES/ NO**

Yes. I support fare-free service for low-income riders, while still collecting fares from riders with higher income who can pay for the service. Fares bring in \$700 million of

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revenue per year that is needed to reinvest in our system, and we do not have an alternative funding mechanism in place yet to address the backlog of much needed system maintenance and system expansion, such as upgrading the Fairmount Line. I will work with Federal, State, and Local leaders to develop those new funding approaches, but in the interim, I believe we should implement a sliding scale fare system based on income.

**5. Do you support the adoption of a curbside composting pickup program? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**(H) Housing**

**1. How would you expand affordable housing in Boston and ensure development without displacement?**

I will secure more resources for affordable homes and public housing options, including more affordable housing for seniors and people with disabilities. I will do this by:

- Using more City-owned land for affordable homes, including leveraging City-owned buildings to create housing adjacent to libraries and community centers.
- Raising the percentage of the Inclusionary Development obligation of developers, and do an annual assessment of the program.
- Create a fund that supports the acquisition of land and creation of affordable housing by community land trusts, and support the creation of shared ownership programs like Neighborhood Investment Companies, which acquire property with capital that is raised by selling interest shares at low cost to community residents.
- Creating more artist housing, so that artists can afford to live and work in Boston.
- Continuing to support innovative methods of redevelopment for BHA properties, including participation in public/private partnerships and leveraging the new \$40B in HUD funding proposed in President Biden's American Jobs Plan.
- Calling on the State and Federal government to contribute more to housing affordability in Boston.

**2. What opportunities do you see for leveraging city-owned land for expanding affordable housing?**

I absolutely support leveraging city-owned land for expanding affordable housing. I would focus on leveraging City-owned buildings to create housing adjacent to libraries, community centers, and other public assets.

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- 3. Do you support a real estate transfer tax for commercial and residential sales, with the revenue going to an affordable housing trust? YES/ NO What exemption threshold, if any, would you advocate for?**

Yes. I would advocate for an exemption threshold of \$2 million.

- 4. Do you support rent control? YES/ NO If so, how would you structure such a policy? If not, why not?**

No. I support the production of more rent-controlled affordable rental units.

- 5. Do you support the renewal of Boston's condo conversion law, which affords residents of covered properties a notice period, right of first refusal to purchase their unit, relocation assistance, just cause eviction, and relocation benefits if their unit is converted to a condominium? YES/ NO**

Yes.

- 6. Would you support a Tenant Opportunity to Purchase ordinance, enabling tenants to purchase a building if the owner seeks to put it on the market? YES/ NO**

Yes.

- 7. Boston's inclusionary development policy (IDP) requires that 13 percent of the units in a building need to be affordable. Do you support increasing this number? YES/ NO If so, to what? *Please List %***

Yes. I am committed to raising the percentage of the Inclusionary Development obligation of developers to between 15-20%, and to an annual assessment of the program.

- 8. Do you support requiring that a majority of new affordable units be built on-site, in order to ensure communities are diverse and integrated? YES/ NO**

No. I support a majority of new units being built in the neighborhood.

- 9. Do you support breaking up the BPDA and creating an independent public office of planning? YES/ NO If so, how will you make it happen?**

No.

- 10. Do you support increasing the number of units that are ADA compliant in projects that receive City funds? YES/ NO**

Yes.

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**(I) Economic Opportunity**

**1. What steps would you propose to reduce Boston's income and wealth inequality, especially the racial wealth gap?**

- Create a minimum guaranteed income pilot program for Boston.
- Establish a citywide apprenticeship program in skilled labor positions.
- Expand Tuition Free Community College program.
- Complete the buildout of the BRJP program to include fees and fines for bad actors.
- Help build a social safety net rooted in dignity that supports upward economic mobility, including:
  - Advocate to expand the Massachusetts Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to 50% of the federal credit.
  - Advocate for the elimination of an asset limit for families on public assistance programs.
- Expand access to homeownership programs.
- Cultivate a citywide housing fund for matching housing down payments, lowering down payments, and reducing closing costs.
- Increase access to capital for new and existing business owners of color.
- Reform the city's procurement process to meet the 25% goal.
- Create new goals for developers of large projects to incorporate equity ownership opportunities into their projects, MBE and WBE participation and first source hiring agreements.
- Encourage shared ownership and cooperative ownership of assets.

**2. Do you support requiring city contractors to give their employees at least two weeks' notice before changing their schedules and to compensate workers for late schedule changes? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**3. Do you support ending subminimum wages for tipped workers in Boston? YES/ NO**

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Yes.

4. **How would you enforce the hiring goals set forth in the Boston Jobs Residency Policy (which requires that least 50 percent of the total work hours in each trade must go to *Boston* residents, at least 25 percent of the total employee work hours in each trade must go to people of color, and at least 10 percent of the total employee work hours in each trade must go to women)?**

I was proud to have led the increase of the Boston Jobs Residency Policy to be at least 51% Boston residents, 40% people of color, and 12% women. To enforce these hiring goals, we must create a transparent dashboard for performance on all projects and create a uniform matrix of fees and fines that would be consistently applied.

5. **What targets in city contracting would you commit to for minority-owned businesses as well as Black-owned businesses in particular, and what steps would you take to realize such targets?**

I led the effort to establish goals for the number of City contracts that are going to people of color and women.

- As a result, the City has committed 15% of contracts for women-owned businesses and 10% for those owned by people of color.
- I would break up large contracts into smaller ones, so that they are more accessible to businesses owned by women and people of color.
- I would establish a fund to provide working capital for MWBEs looking to contract with the City
- I would lower the bonding and insurance requirements for contracts.
- I would shorten the length of time it takes the City to reimburse on public contracts.
- I would push to award more discretionary contracts by asking the state legislature to raise the award threshold.
- I would provide technical assistance so that MWBEs can be more competitive.
- I will assess the contracts awarded and availability of bids annually in order to set new

City's goals for the percentage of City contracts going to people of color and women, with specific goals for Black-owned businesses.

- a. **Will you commit to immediately directing all City departments and quasi-city agencies to unbundle large contracts that are set to become available in 2021 and beyond in order to facilitate this? YES/ NO**

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Yes.

- b. Will you commit to regular reporting to track progress toward and beyond this goal? YES/ NO**

Yes.

- 6. The cannabis industry is expected to be a major source of growth in Boston in the coming years. What steps should the City take to make sure that it grows in an equitable way, in which the communities most impacted by the drug war are able to benefit?**

As Chief of Economic Development for the last seven years, I worked to make sure that the nascent cannabis industry grew in an equitable way, and that it created economic opportunities for the communities most negatively impacted by the war on drugs: communities of color. We created a Boston Cannabis Board, which evaluates and votes on license applications publicly, using clear criteria. We created a “one for one” application process that mandates that the Board and only review a non-equity applicant at the time it reviews one equity applicant. Board members represent the diversity of Boston’s neighborhoods. We created a Boston Cannabis Equity Program which provides technical assistance, and helps with legal compliance. We also created a fund to provide resources to applicants. We created an Office of Emerging Industries to walk people through the process of applying for a license. As Mayor, I would expand on this work, and do more to ensure that the growing cannabis industry creates positive and sustainable economic opportunities, especially for people of color.

- 7. Would you support the creation of a municipal broadband network? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**(J) Democracy**

- 1. Do you support allowing non-citizens with legal status the right to vote in municipal elections? YES/ NO**

Yes.

- 2. Do you support allowing 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in municipal elections? YES/ NO**

Yes.

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**3. In 2022, Boston will engage in redistricting on the municipal level. What would an equitable redistricting process look like to you?**

An equitable redistricting process will be transparent and inclusive.

**4. Would you support the redrawing of Boston's wards and precincts ("reprecincting"), which has not happened in more than 100 years -- and which happens decennially in other MA cities and towns? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**(K) Additional Comments**

As Boston transitions from our response to the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis and into our long term recovery efforts, we have the opportunity and obligation to chart a new course. We must make sure that Boston's residents, institutions, businesses, and non-profit organizations recover in a way that restores our strengths, addresses our weaknesses, and adjusts to our new reality. We must prioritize public health in new and powerful ways.

- I have a long track record of creating positive change. I have the experience needed to bring the city together and achieve our most important goals: from a strong recovery from COVID, to powerful investments in public education, affordable homes, and racial justice.
- I have a plan to tackle our biggest challenges in a holistic and forward-thinking way; and with the values of equity, justice, and sustainability embedded into everything we do. This is how we will become a stronger community where people are empowered to thrive at every stage of life and in every way that they interact with the city around them.
- I am grateful to the Downtown Progressives, JP Progressives, and Progressive West Roxbury/Roslindale for your time and consideration. I look forward to continuing conversations with you, and I hope to earn your endorsement.

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