

2021 Boston City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Alex Gray

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(A) Your Candidacy

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

If elected to serve as an At-Large Boston City Councilor, my top three priorities would be:

Jobs & Economic Relief: As we continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that we implement policy centered on the communities that have been most impacted: people of color, seniors, the disability community, and front line workers. In addition to this, we must focus our recovery efforts on small businesses in our Main Street districts that serve as the backbone of our neighborhoods. As we build back from the pandemic, it is vital that we take bold steps to expand job opportunities for residents that pay a living wage and offer the benefits that they deserve. I believe that Bostonians should be connected to the jobs of the future.

Housing: As a city councilor, I will work to develop more affordable and accessible housing options for our residents. It is vital that we ensure that these housing options connect Bostonians to transportation, school, work, healthcare, businesses, and green spaces. Everyone in the city deserves to have quality access to their everyday needs.

Education: It is imperative that we fully fund our schools with the necessary resources to provide a quality learning environment for each and every student. As a Boston City Council member, I will work to ensure that our students and educators have everything that they need to succeed in the classroom and at home.

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

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I am proud of the work I have done throughout my career in public service as an advocate for permanent housing solutions for individuals experiencing homelessness with the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, working to improve transportation under Governor Patrick, and most recently, improving pathways to careers under Mayor Walsh. These experiences have also allowed me to work in every neighborhood of Boston, which I believe will give me the insight and understanding to do the job on day one.

I also believe that my lived experience makes me well-suited for this position. Being blind has taught me the value of advocating for others, because my parents and teachers advocated for me to remain and succeed in public school. It has also taught me the meaning of really listening - and hearing - others. I have found that by listening to those impacted, a good policy idea can be made great and a community can begin to thrive.

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

In New York City, policies have been introduced to revive the arts and entertainment industry which have been hit so hard during the pandemic. These efforts have led to great successes, such as the creation of pop-up shows, socially distant performances, and grants being provided to artists and community art groups. With arts and entertainment comprising such a lively and critical piece of Boston's fabric, I would like to explore how we can provide similar relief to our arts community.

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)

. I take pride in running a campaign that is inclusive and open to all. I think it is important, especially in the polarized political climate that we are experiencing right now in our country, to build bridges between different groups, especially those that we don't always see eye to eye with on the issues. I am and always will be forthright with contributors to my campaign about where I stand on the issues, and will never deviate away from my principles. I have a record of fighting for and achieving progressive policy wins and I believe that people can look to my record of accomplishment.

(B) Racial Equity & Community Engagement

1. Name three accomplishments you've been able to achieve to advance racial justice or equity.

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During my time in public service, I am proud of achieving these accomplishments to advance racial justice and equity:

Fairmount Commuter Rail Line: During my time in Gov. Patrick's administration, I worked to launch the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line, which has worked to bring more equitable transportation to communities of color across the city.

Tuition-Free Community College: In Mayor Walsh's administration, I helped to start the city's first-ever tuition free community college program, working to make higher education more affordable for BPS graduates. Since its start, the program has had over 500 participants, and the great majority of whom are people of color.

Tax Credit Expansion: During my time in Mayor Walsh's administration, I helped with the city's effort to advocate for the expansion of earned income tax credits which is targeted at reducing inequities in wealth acquisition which has a big impact for communities of color.

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 in public service, I have come to understand that a community can begin to thrive when policy centers on the needs of people first, and that the best way to ensure that this happens is to engage directly with a community and hear their needs and concerns. For me, it was the voices of those who told me their stories—the guidance counselor in Roxbury, the residents along the Fairmount Line, and the individuals facing homelessness - who helped me to begin to understand the right solutions to the problems facing our city. My campaign has already continued to facilitate these conversations through our virtual listening tours, which will be held in every neighborhood of Boston. As a City Councilor, I will hold regular office hours and continue to visit with constituents across the city to meet them where they are and to gain their input on ways to move Boston forward.

(C) Charter Reform & Balance of Power

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

I see the role of the City Council as one that “fights for tomorrow and delivers today.” By this, I mean that we are responsible for providing excellent constituent services and making sure that people are connected to the services they need and helping them navigate the system in the present. Looking towards the future, I believe that the City Council serves as a check on the budget and the implementation of policy and programming, and offers alternative solutions to problems.

**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**

Yes.

- 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. I am open to a conversation on term limits for elected officials that balances the benefits that elected officials gain from their time and experience in office and the need for change. I do not have a specific time period in mind at this point.

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

I would like to find ways either through the charter or home-rule petitions for the city to be able to raise more revenue directly.

(D) Revenue

- 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?**

In terms of opportunities for the city to raise revenue, I believe that we should look into a transfer tax on certain high-income properties in the city. I think there is also an opportunity to explore inventory of city owned land, and selling underutilized properties as a way to generate revenue.

(E) Education

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

Many of our students, educators, and staff face a great deal of challenges outside of the classroom, affecting their ability to maximize their potential at school. These challenges include lack of access to adequate transportation, affordable and accessible housing, and encounters with law enforcement within schools. These issues, which are further exacerbated by systemic racial and economic inequalities, are top priorities for me in order to close the gap that currently exists and foster a learning environment that is conducive to all students in the BPS.

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

Yes.

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?

Yes. I support a hybrid model in regards to the makeup of BPS school committees. I support half of the members being appointed by the Mayor of Boston and I am open to a conversation on whether the second half should be elected directly by voters or should be voted on by specific groups such as the City Council, students, teachers, etc. My fear is that if all of the positions are elected, certain community voices will be left out and not have a seat at the table.

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

Yes. Schools struggle to find proper funding for mental health clinicians and nurses on site, and I would be in favor of utilizing the resources currently allotted to police officers in schools to these needs.

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. I thought it made sense to make the quick and difficult decision to put a pause on the entrance exam during the pandemic for the upcoming school year. In terms of what the exam school policy should be more permanently, I do think further conversations are necessary to make that decision. It is important for us to ensure that neighborhoods across the city have access to our exam schools but it is also important for families to have time to plan the future of their children's education properly. I am open to a conversation on what percentage of seats should go to neighborhoods and what percentage should go to those with high exam scores, but don't know what the exact right formula for that is at the moment.

My top priority in education will always be ensuring that special education students have access to classrooms across the city and that they have the resources they need to succeed. Sadly, special education is far too often left out of the conversations we have on education, whether it is exam school entrance requirements or other conversations.

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

In the short-term, I would look to use federal stimulus funds to address the immediate need for increased access to early childhood education. From a long term perspective, I

would like to explore further State funding, partnerships with the private sector and Non-Profits encouraging employers and organizations to support pre-K services.

(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**

Yes.

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

Yes.

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

No. I support efforts to reduce overtime costs for BPD by exploring the hiring of more officers which would reduce overtime costs by meeting staffing needs with regular pay versus overtime pay. Increasing the overall number of BPD officers also allows the ability to implement the provision within the task force recommendations to diversify the force with graduates of BPS. I also support the exploration of ways to reduce costs by the examination of where BPD officers are required for events or details.

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

I would like to see greater diversity in terms of BPD hires through the implementation of the task force provision giving preference to BPS graduates. I would like to see more officers hired so that minimum staffing needs can be met by officers receiving regular

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pay versus overtime pay. I would like to see mental health clinicians play a greater role in responding to and take the lead when necessary in responding to cases where individuals with mental health conditions are involved. Working with the new Office of Police Accountability, I would like clearer guidelines on how BPD plans to hold its officers accountable for wrongdoing. I would like to examine what events constitute a need for police presence. I would also like more resources given to trauma services in neighborhoods experiencing violence.

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 believe that mental health clinicians and individuals with social work backgrounds should be given the responsibility of responding to mental health calls, not police officers. I am glad that we have set up a civilian review board, and look forward to working to strengthen civilian control in disciplinary matters.

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?

No. I would look into shifting money that is currently being put towards having law enforcement in schools towards funding for mental health clinicians and nurses in all BPS schools. I also would like to see resources directed to mental health clinicians who can take the lead on responding to instances regarding a mental health condition. I would also explore shifting funds towards professionals who can better help respond to trauma in neighborhoods caused by violence.

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)

. I am by no means an expert on matters pertaining to law enforcement, but it is my belief that these resources should be used rarely, if ever. Taking that into account, the City Council should have an active voice when and how they are 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?

No. White supremacy is a serious national concern and is a security challenge, and as a City Councilor I will work to combat instances of white supremacy here in Boston wherever it exists.

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

Yes.

(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?**

I do believe that Boston needs to reduce its dependence on cars and encourage and incentivize people to utilize other means of transportation to navigate the city. This can be done by promoting and making it easier for all residents to bike, walk, ride the bus, and ride the T. We must invest in infrastructure for alternative modes of transportation.

- 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?**

Energy Neutrality: Currently, nearly 70% of the city's greenhouse gas emissions come from its buildings so the City must continue to not only take the lead with our own buildings but encourage others to reduce energy use wherever possible.

Recycling: I would look for an opportunity for us to create our own recycling facility in the city. Such an opportunity has the potential to improve our recycling capabilities within the city as well as provide a new source of revenue.

Vehicle Usage: I would promote the use of biking, walking, and utilizing public transportation whenever possible. Additionally, I would look to have the city move as quickly as possible towards the use of electric vehicles for school busses and trash collection.

As we work to make Boston a climate-resilient city, we must make sure that we are listening to the communities that are most adversely affected by climate change. This means ensuring that representatives from these communities are a large part of the planning process.

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

. I believe that we are on the pathway to achieving fossil fuel independence in Boston and must continue to lower our usage and dependency in a responsible and feasible manner.

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

Yes.

- 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?**

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I would revisit the usage of public lands as an opportunity to expand affordable housing without displacing people. As we come out of the pandemic, I think that we also should be looking at the lower demand for office space as a potential opportunity to be shifted towards housing. We must continue to support the Boston Housing Authority and Community Development Corporations with as many resources as possible because these types of organizations are proven leaders in providing affordable housing.

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

I believe that there is a possibility to build affordable housing over existing city properties, and that this avenue is one worth exploring further. I am intrigued by the idea in Egleston Square of building housing on top of the existing library structure.

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 a \$2 million exemption threshold.

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

Yes. I support passing a state law that would give Boston the opportunity to vote on whether or not to institute rent control.

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 look forward to monitoring the city council conversations to understand what makes the most sense in terms of an increased percentage moving forward. With some of the tools that have recently been given to the city such as the Affirmatively Furthering

Fair Housing policy, I believe we will now have a better understanding of housing and displacement and that this will be used to inform what the best policy is moving forward.

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. With the high need for affordable housing currently in Boston, I think it is important to keep the opportunity to have the higher 15-18% off-site affordable option on the table to increase the overall production of affordable units and produce as many units as possible during this high-need time.

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.

(I) Economic Opportunity

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

I want to support efforts for first time home buyers, such as the city's First Generation Home Buyer program, as home ownership is one of the best ways for people, especially people of color, to accumulate wealth. I also would like to continue the city's efforts to make pathways to higher education more affordable by continuing to support the Children's Savings Accounts program as well as the Tuition-free Community College program. Furthermore, I would like to provide increased job training resources for those workers impacted by the pandemic, especially those in the hotel and hospitality industries, which are largely made up of people of color. I will also ensure that people with disabilities are included in these conversations, because sadly, people with disabilities nationally rank consistently as the highest group of people that are unemployed and chronically poor.

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**

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)?**

In the short term, I would encourage modeling the work recently started by the BPDA that uses the diversity of a team as a key factor in the approval process. Also, we must work to recruit and support diverse companies in the construction industry in Boston. In the longer term, we must support programs like Building Pathways that recruit women and people of color to enter the trades and work to support BPS vocational programs to build a pipeline of Boston residents to enter the trades.

- 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 believe that we need to have a specific approach for the three main facets of city contracting: construction, goods, and services. Additionally, we need to make it easier to separate contracts into smaller parts so that more businesses, especially those owned by people of color, can better compete for them.

- 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**

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?**

There are a number of ways for the city to equitably grow the cannabis industry in Boston. We must explore and support job training programs that support the cannabis

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industry and recruit from Boston neighborhoods hard-hit by the negative impacts of the policing of drugs. Additionally, we must promote programs for Boston residents that teach people how to establish their own businesses and give them the potential to one day own and operate businesses that fit within the cannabis industry.

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.

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 model is one that first is reflective of the city in terms of the leadership of the conversation and the planning of conversations and implementation of the plan. Ultimately, it is a plan that allows for the electorate to be reflected in the leadership that it elects.

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. I am open to a conversation of the redrawing of Boston wards and precincts. It needs to be a process which is led by a diverse leadership team and is thorough in terms of the conversations that take place and the constituencies which are included in the conversations.

(K) Additional Comments

We have a historic opportunity in Boston, along with historic challenges. The Boston City Council has become a much more diverse and representative body over the past 10 years. However, we still lack equitable representation of the disability community.

If elected, I would be the first blind City Councilor in Boston history, and one of just two blind city councilors in the nation. However, while representation alone would be a huge

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step forward, it is not enough. I often say that the disability community is the greatest ally that other marginalized groups never knew they had. I will bring this mindset to my work on the City Council, and always practice intersectionality in my approach to policy, constituent services, and community engagement. I hope that my message resonates with Boston voters looking to build an inclusive and accessible city, and I will always be open to listening to new approaches or ideas. Ultimately, many solutions will be proposed within this campaign but we will not achieve equitable solutions without the perspective of the disability community at the table.

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