

2021 Boston City Council Candidate Questionnaire

David Halbert

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(A) Your Candidacy

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

Housing Justice: Creating affordable, accessible, & reliable housing options, for homeowners & renters, is critical to building vibrant, thriving communities. Housing access and stability are also often the keys to most effectively delivering social services to those in need.

Education Equity: The 54,000+ students in Boston Public Schools – like my daughter - deserve quality school choices in every neighborhood. When we fail to support our schools, we fail to build our future. As a BPS parent, ensuring good schools across Boston isn't just policymaking – it's personal.

Economic Opportunity: Small businesses are critical to Boston. They provide immigrants with access to the American Dream, and second chances for those coming home from incarceration. Businesses owned and operated by women & people of color have racism & sexism added to the numerous challenges entrepreneurs face every day. We must provide them with the fair, equitable, and culturally competent the support they need.

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

I have over 15 years of professional experience in public service including as a legislative aide for Boston City Councilors Sam Yoon and John Tobin. I know how the Council works, from the inside. With a Master's Degree in Public Administration I also have the training necessary to both identify areas of city government that need improvement, and to develop progressive, equity focused solutions for systemic change.

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I am deeply rooted in Boston's civic life and have served the community for years with roles in organizations including East Boston Main Streets; the Greater Mattapan Neighborhood Council; & the Young Professionals Network of the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts.

As a Black man, and particularly as a Black BPS parent, I will bring representation to the Council that is currently absent, and use my unique perspective to inform every decision on how we ensure Boston's opportunities are truly available to all.

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

I would like to see Boston adopt a coordinated, single-payer healthcare system for community based behavioral health service provision modeled after Philadelphia's "Community Behavioral Health" program. This would provide a streamlined and cost-effective way to deliver needed services to those in need dealing with mental health diagnoses, substance use disorder, and other behavioral challenges.

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, Police officers. We have committed to not taking any police union money.

(B) Racial Equity & Community Engagement

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

As a leader of the Boston chapter of the New Leaders Council, a national progressive leadership development program, I was deeply involved in early efforts to diversify the applicant pool & training cohort. This has led to increasingly inclusive classes and given networking & development opportunities to dynamic leaders like former Boston City Council candidate Lee Nave, Jr. & State Representative Tram Nguyen.

I helped establish, and served as director of, the People of Color in Criminal Justice Conference, the only gathering of its kind in New England, focusing on the unique experiences, perspectives, and challenges of people of color who are public safety professionals.

I have helped lead efforts in East Boston to reform the membership process and outreach strategy of the Piers Park Advisory Committee, in order to provide more direct

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communication and opportunities for representation for all residents of East Boston – particularly the neighborhood’s LatinX majority which is currently unrepresented on the board of directors.

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?

If elected I would work to bring budget hearings out of City Hall and directly into communities, in a similar fashion to the Legislature’s field hearings. I would establish a “roadshow” in my first year in office to bring the completed budget to communities and discuss how its’ provisions would specifically impact individual neighborhoods. This would both empower communities with information about the most important document that city government creates, and help establish a baseline for community-led evaluation.

While serving on the Board of Higher Education during college I was able to triple the number of students represented in Board work, a change still in effect almost 20 years later. This is just one example of my ability to think creatively and work effectively to make substantive, systemic changes that increase access, agency, and representation for communities.

(C) Charter Reform & Balance of Power

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

The first responsibility of the City Council is to serve as an independent counterpart to the Mayor in order to provide leadership guided by different perspectives, sensitivities to need, and approaches to problem solving. Adding this diversity to the policy development process is critical to achieve the most comprehensive outcomes possible.

Equally important is the role Councilors play as points of connection between Bostonians and their government – particularly basic city services. In order to be effective and meet these responsibilities all Councilors must have a constant focus not just on responsive constituent service, but also on establishing the necessary relationships to efficiently move requests forward.

Finally, the Council has a duty to provide effective oversight by serving as a source of credible evaluation of city government performance. Any such analysis must take into account not just basic performance metrics, but also review activities relative to demographic and geographic equity.

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

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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.

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

1) Disqualifying signatures removed 2) Shift of municipal primary to early June 3) Give the City Council to independently craft a budget

(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?**

Any efforts made by the city to raise revenue should be assessed relative to how regressive they are in their impact on the most economically vulnerable in Boston. As such I believe that a more equitable plan to secure additional funding is to increase investment in the growth of the city's small business sector.

This includes working with local business organizations, such as Boston's Main Streets districts and the city's various chambers of commerce, to streamline interactions with city government. It means working with businesses, especially BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and women-led businesses, to create more direct and reliable pathways to the capital necessary to start and grow businesses. This also means taking intentional steps to increase procurement by the city with our small business sector.

Taking these steps will not only generate more sales tax revenue for the city but will also keep more dollars circulating through our local neighborhood economies.

(E) Education

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

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Every BPS student must have access to an academically high-performing school in their own community with all necessary student support services, including trauma/violence intervention and residential support services for students encountering homelessness.

BPS must increase recruitment, retention, and advancement opportunities for educators of color in a school district that is overwhelmingly Black and LatinX. We know that having educators who share cultural backgrounds and sensitivities with the students they instruct has a demonstrably positive impact on student performance and achievement.

We must also address the incredible disparities in access to externally raised private funding between our schools. We should set a cap on the amount of private funding an individual school can raise with anything above that cap split equally between the school and the Boston Educational Development Fund, and a portion of BEDF funding specifically dedicated to fundraising training for members of high-need school communities.

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 believe the way forward is a hybrid model that combines elected & appointed seats. I propose 3 elected members and 4 appointed ones. The 3 elected positions would each represent a distinct area of the city, with districts built by combining current City Council districts. The 4 appointed seats would be 2 from the Mayor; the City Council Education Committee Chair (or designee), and a student member – who would receive a full vote and stipend like the other committee members.

This model preserves accountability for the Mayor, adds accountability for the City Council, and, most importantly, provides Bostonians - including our students - with direct voices at the table in decisions about the education of our children.

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

Yes.

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. We should utilize the changes recently adopted by the School Committee to address the impact of the pandemic, and championed by a coalition of education equity

& civil rights organizations across the city. Awarding a portion of seats strictly on academic grounds, while having the majority assigned by a combination of geography and academic performance, creates a closer alignment between the overall district demographics and exam school populations.

An admissions exam can be a useful component of a comprehensive assessment of applicants for seats in the exam schools, but should not be the primary determinant of whether or not to admit a student. Any exam adopted must avoid the failing of the previously used ISEE exam, its misalignment with the standard BPS curriculum. This put traditional BPS students – particularly those without access to supplemental training – at a distinct structural disadvantage relative to their private & parochial school peers.

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

I would advocate for a portion of PILOT payments to be specifically allocated to support the establishment of universal pre-K access in all schools.

(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.

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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 do not support a hard cap for individual officer overtime because I do not believe it will create the kind of structural changes, and cost savings, that need to occur within BPD. Rather it will incentivize reaching the cap as quickly as possible in order to create an additional leverage point in contract negotiations with the city.

We must institute deeper systemic reform to the compensation structure for officers, via their respective collective bargaining agreements, through reductions in the minimum amount of guaranteed overtime hours. The goal should be to reduce hours claimed and dollars spent overall, while increasing the amount of work product that actually helps provide closure to victims - such as investigations to raise Boston's homicide, hate crime, and sexual assault clearance rates – rather than artificially inflating salaries.

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 advocate for changes to the overtime pay structure for officers. As we have seen, the overtime budget has consistently exceeded projections used during the budget development process. By continually adding this additional strain to the budget BPD overtime also reduces the availability of critically needed resources from other areas of city operations.

I would advocate that the guaranteed rate of compensation be initially cut in half from four hours to two hours. This would significantly reduce the amount of money paid in overtime, and would also incentivize more actual work being done during those compensated periods.

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 the Safe & Successful Youth Initiative would be better housed under the Boston Center for Youth and Families. Given the natural mandate for BCYF in providing community based opportunities and support, with a particular focus on our youth population, I believe that making this shift could remove barriers for program participation for youth who may have a negative or even adversarial relationship with law enforcement.

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. As an advocate for the shuttering of the gang database I believe that any and all related funding should be given to communities. This reallocation should be focused on

programs and organizations that are working to rectify and heal the harm that has been caused to residents, particularly young men of color, who have been historically over-policed.

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.

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. I believe that even one officer with affiliations or sympathies with white supremacist organizations is a problem for the Boston Police Department, and more importantly for the residents of Boston. As a member of the City Council I would demand that anyone credibly accused of such behavior be removed from the street, fully investigated, and, if reasonably and fairly determined to be guilty of this, immediately terminated with no possibility of reinstatement.

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?

Boston does need to reduce its dependence on cars. We can achieve this by intentional efforts around a number of areas. The first is redesigning our streetscapes to encourage adequate – and safe – access by pedestrians and cyclists in a truly connected citywide network. Next, we must make the necessary space on our roads for services like bus rapid transit, such as is found in other parts of the world. Third, we must work from City Hall to connect with leaders from other MBTA service communities to effectively advocate for establishing a fare-free T – with a long-term goal of being part of a fully integrated statewide public transit system. Finally, we must work to create more walkable neighborhoods, similar to Roslindale Village, where the presence of a robust selection of businesses and services in close proximity largely eliminates the need to use a car in the first place.

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?

For Boston to become a truly climate-resilient city for everyone we must approach all policy conversations, such as those around transit, education, and development, from the perspective of delivering real environmental justice, in order to fully address the

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climate crisis and its disparate impacts on Bostonians relative to their neighborhood, race, class, and socio-economic status.

My top priorities would be:

Crafting a green building framework that establishes high standards including net-zero carbon emissions for new development, and retrofitting existing buildings with a focus on environmental justice communities.

Fully leveraging the economic power of the city through procurement with environmentally responsible vendors; and encouraging the city's retirement fund to make sustainability a key metric for all investments.

Creating the environmental stewards of the future by supporting green STEM programs throughout BPS and making Madison Park the leading green vocational school in the country.

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. The best way to achieve fare-free public transit is to work with municipal counterparts in other MBTA communities to make the case to our state-level representatives for the necessity of this change, in terms of economic, environmental, and social equity & justice. This must be mirrored by advocacy with the members of our federal delegation to secure the necessary funding to make this vision a reality. This legislative strategy must be accompanied by an educational campaign to inform the broader public of the overall societal value of such an investment of public resources – and that the benefit extends beyond just those directly using the service, such as the reduction of cars on roads and corresponding pollution. By doing so we can not only create an MBTA that provides open, reliable access for the residents of Boston, but truly lay the foundation for a comprehensive, seamless statewide mass transit system.

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 believe that allowing for greater density in development is a key component of addressing the housing and housing affordability crisis in Boston. We must be intentional about where this added density is sited though, to minimize disruption to communities. Newer, bigger building should be situated near mass transit hubs and directly along

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major thoroughfares, in order to promote extensive use of alternatives to cars. As we think about affordable housing in particular we must also ensure that we are providing access to different housing configurations in order to fully meet the needs of reducing displacement. This means that we must encourage and incentivize the creation of family-sized affordable units, in addition to the single-occupancy units that are more abundant.

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

Boston should utilize city owned land to create opportunities for development that significantly exceeds existing requirements for affordable housing. For traditional private developers this should mean committing to a 0.5/1 ratio of affordable to market rate units at a minimum. The cost of this type of project should be offset by favorable terms for the properties in question. No single family developments should be allowed as part of proposals for any city owned land. The city should also increase efforts aimed at establishing community land trusts throughout Boston as a further means of preservation of access to affordable housing.

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 do not believe that there should be an exemption threshold for such sales.

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

Yes. I would advocate for a cap on rental increases that is indexed to the city's median household income level, rather than the more commonly referenced but misapplied Area Median Income figure, and focused on keeping rental expenses below 30% of that figure for families. This would only be applied to families or individuals who would be verified to be making at or below 150% of the median household income level, and would need to be verified with the city on an annual basis for inclusion in the program.

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

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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 believe the Inclusionary Development Policy percentage should be raised to a minimum of 20% on-site and 25% off-site, in line with other major metropolitan areas – including communities in Greater Boston.

- 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**

Yes.

- 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?**

Yes. I would work with my fellow Councilors and the Mayor's office to successfully craft and pass a home rule petition outlining a new structure with two independent agencies focused on planning and economic development, respectively. This home rule petition would be drafted by soliciting input from subject matter experts in both fields, existing BPDA personnel (in order to minimize disruptions in services provided & institutional memory loss), and the residents of Boston, in order to intentionally avoid replicating instances of community harm that they have felt the current BPDA has historically created or advanced. Upon passage at City Hall I would work with the Boston State House delegation to move this bill quickly and effectively through the Legislature, with minimal adjustments.

- 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 would seek to work with Boston's economic development department to identify areas where the city can increase investment into businesses led by people of color. This would also mean taking a systematic approach to addressing the structural obstacles many business owners from marginalized communities facing in securing the necessary capital and technical support for growth and success.

I would promote increasing access to home ownership programs and capital to allow lower income members of the community to become homeowners and use these homes to build equity and intergenerational wealth – with a particular focus on communities of color across the city. This should be paired with a parallel program created to successfully transition renters into homes successfully.

I would also push to create universal, publicly funded K0 & K1 classrooms across the city. This will significantly impact the ability of parents and caregivers to return to the workforce more quickly and reduce the burden of paying out-of-pocket for childcare, which can be financially crippling for many.

- 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)?**

Employers who continually violate the Boston Jobs Residency Policy must be held to account. I would work to establish more severe penalties for repeated violations, up to and including bans on work within the city for a defined period of time. I would also levy fines against violators with funds secured going to targeted workforce development and job training programs, as well as to provide additional support for Madison Park High School, to help increase the overall pool and diversity within the skilled labor community.

- 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 would work to have a target of participation in city contracting that is within 10% of a demographic group's presence in the total population of the city. As Councilor I would seek to Chair the Post-Audit and Oversight Committee for the purpose of holding hearings to evaluate the city's progress towards achieving these benchmarks in all departments and procurement decisions. In addition I would use this information as key component during the crafting of the city

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budget and in public discussions with all departments and their leadership during that process.

- 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?**

Boston must prioritize access to opportunity for entrepreneurs within the cannabis industry who represent the communities that have been most significantly harmed by racist drug policies for decades. This means placing a higher priority on applications and proposals not just from these business people, but from those who are backed by diverse investor groups as well. It is not enough to have a token individual as the corporate face of such a company if those receiving the greatest benefits do not also share in those legacies of harm. Additionally, the city should use a portion of funds received to support a specific small business grant program aimed exclusively at those from and operating in marginalized communities.

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 process would be one that intentionally works to create opportunities for historically marginalized communities, whose voices are often underrepresented in the policymaking process, to have as robust a degree of representation as possible. This would be achieved by conducting a community-led redistricting process that prioritizes transparency and the provision of agency to all residents of the city – rather than using redistricting as a tool to protect incumbents and maintain disparities in Boston’s civic power structure. I would also promote subjecting any redistricting plan to a special citywide referendum.

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