

2021 Boston City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Kendra Hicks

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(A) Your Candidacy

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

Housing, Education, and Climate

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

These times require leadership that is driven into action by a vision of a more equitable city. My personal experience as a public school graduate, a first-generation child of immigrants, a mother of a special needs child, and an organizer gives me a unique vantage point of the issues facing our district, how they intersect how we can solve them. The only way to confront all these systemic issues is with solutions that go upstream, to the heart of the problems. District 6 can be an example. Together we can ensure that our children are enriched by learning spaces that are diverse, resource-rich, and centered on the needs of students, their families, and educators. We can invest in meeting our people's basic needs while also working to create different ways of preventing, responding to, and healing from violence. All our neighbors deserve affordable, safe, and stable homes, free and accessible public transit, and environmental regulations that keep Boston's most vulnerable communities healthy and resilient in the face of climate change. We can rearrange our values and put people over profit, protect workers, democratize workplaces, and guarantee sustainable livelihoods so families can thrive rather than just survive paycheck to paycheck.

We can build on our strong cultural identity by activating our artists, strengthening our cultural districts, and integrating creative interventions into some of our most pressing issues.

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If elected to the city council, I'll be bringing my years of experience as a youth worker, an organizer, a nonprofit executive, and a racial equity consultant with me to make sure e're a city that works for the many and not just a few.

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

Universal Basic Income program: Even before the pandemic brought economic disruption to Boston, serious structural problems existed in the City's economy. Despite a relatively high median income of \$71,834 per household, Boston is currently the 7th most unequal city in the country. The bottom 20% of households live on an average income of \$14,900 a year, below the federal poverty line for a family of two. Cities across the country, including Stockton, California, and Chelsea, Massachusetts, have begun experimenting with basic

income experiments aimed at reducing poverty, tackling the economic impact of systemic racism, and creating a more equitable economy. Boston should emulate these successful programs by launching a large pilot program to provide direct cash assistance to low-income residents. Establish a pilot basic income program within the City's Department of Economic Development to provide \$2,000 in annual cash assistance to low-income households to be paid out in monthly installments. Funding to consist of a \$60 million commitment from the City to be supplemented by additional grant funding and foundation support (provide payments to 30,000 households). I would propose a targeted program aimed at the lowest 20% of income distribution that would generate significant economic growth and reduction in household poverty

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)

For-profit developers, Fossil fuel executives or lobbyists, Charter school advocates and lobbyists, Police officers.

(B) Racial Equity & Community Engagement

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

a. Founded Beantown Society: Once I aged out of the programs at Spontaneous Celebration, my friends and I realized quickly that there weren't many options for us. We could get sucked into the machine of violence and poverty that, in those times, was all-consuming here, or we could step into our power and do something about it. Not just for us, but everyone. That summer, we founded Beantown Society, a "by youth, for youth"

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program whose mission today is the same as 16 years ago, to unite youth across race class, and culture to end youth violence by transforming young people's oppression into youth power. At 15, this started me on a long path of service. Beantown Society helped change the youth organizing landscape in Boston; the impact of our work expanded beyond the walls of Spontaneous, and our neighborhood's border into middle schools and high schools all across the city.

b. Racial Justice work with Boston Health Commission: Without my years of service, I wouldn't truly understand how our existing systems make it nearly impossible to change our community outcomes. I brought all the lessons learned while serving into my role at the Boston Public Health Commission, where I saw an opportunity to make city-wide policy changes. At the Center for Health Equity and Racial Justice, I oversaw a coalition of over 300 Black women and worked with our team to ensure that all the work done for Boston was planned through a racial equity lens. In addition to building the commission's racial equity infrastructure, we trained 1,100 employees, including the city of Boston's EMTs, on race, racism, and equity, how it showed up in their work, and what we should do about it.

c. Resist Foundation work: For the last six years, I've spent my time stewarding local and national organizations through structural transformations, diversifying their leadership, anchoring them in collective values, and building more democratic workplaces. This work blossomed out of my current position at the Resist Foundation; we took Resist from a disconnected top-down structure to a leader in the national philanthropic field led by the people most impacted and is responsive and accountable to our grantees. If we get on the ground and listen to what people need and commit to building systems, policies, and practices that promote equity on the municipal level, we can transform our district and our city. If elected to the city council, I'll be bringing my years of experience as a youth worker, an organizer, a nonprofit executive, and a racial equity consultant with me to make sure we're a city that works for the many and not just a few.

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?

In the campaign, this looks like building policy collectively through community policy ideation sessions. These sessions brought members of the community together (virtually by Zoom) to discuss their visions and ideas for their city across six key policy areas: Justice in Education; Investment in Community Safety; Healthy & Affordable Homes; Environmental Justice; Fair Wages & Equitable Economy; and Strong & Vibrant Culture. We launched our Letters from the Future campaign to actively solicit input from residents in the district.

Since communities don't often have systems to hold elected officials accountable, we're

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collectively building an accountability process with community organizers that I believe can be a model in the city and state. Our fellows, staff, and volunteers represent the district across demographics, including age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and class.

(C) Charter Reform & Balance of Power

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

Beyond the current role of the city council, I believe part of our job is to transition us from a strong mayor system via charter reform, to a system that builds a deeper, more representative democracy by redistributing power to the City Council and then back to the communities we represent.

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

[This question was left blank]

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

I also support a return to an elected school committee.

(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?

a. The City should work to maximize payments by incentivizing the program for tax-exempt organizations, create a commission to oversee PILOT operations and make

changes when needed, and create a community engagement process (among other things).

b. I will advocate for the passage of the Fair Share Amendment at the state level which will help generate additional revenue for our public schools.

c. Expanding the number of licenses we issue for cannabis dispensaries will create additional revenue via the 3% tax that the city collects. A portion of this can be directed to increase BPS funding.

(E) Education

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

a. Return to an elected school committee

b. Advocate for baseline funding for all BPS schools coupled with the weighted student funding

c. Disrupting the school to prison pipeline

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. An elected school committee, one that is accountable to the people it represents, will better address the needs of schools, teachers, students, and families. It's the fundamental change we need to ensure our school districts are equitable and thriving. We are leaning towards supporting a structure that mimics the current city council model in order to mitigate concerns about dark money coming into the school committee races. With that said, we are in deep conversation with education advocates and are willing to shift our thinking if we find there's a more equitable structure than the one we're proposing. I will work with Councilor Edwards to expand the scope of current city charter reform initiatives. If required, I will spearhead the home rule petition application to the state legislature. Until then, our student representative must be given equal status on the committee, including a vote and stipend.

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. I support the recommendation of the Exam School Admission Taskforce. The task force is embarking on a new process that has considered previous feedback they've received regarding how they engaged stakeholders and I am excited to hear their recommendations for a more equitable admissions process now that we have more voices at the table.

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

As with most issues in BPS, there are myriad reasons that we do not yet have universal pre-K. I believe that we need to commit to an investment in creating a well-resourced pre-K system in Boston. Pre-k is both an education justice issue and an economic justice issue. I commit to learning more about the barriers to entry for in-home pre-schools as well as the barriers that prevent BPS from expanding the number of seats they are offering.

(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

Yes. I don't have a deep enough understanding of the contract to state a number.

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

Strengthen Transparency and Accountability

The Boston Police Department's Contract is policy, and their budget is the second-largest expenditure in our City's budget. As we build toward a community-centered process regarding the Boston Police Department's contract negotiations, given the police's unique powers in our communities, I will call for the Boston Police Department's contract negotiations to be made publicly viewable just as City Council hearings are. This will provide a public forum that will facilitate transparency and give us the information we need to make informed decisions while preserving our right to collectively bargain with represented city employees.

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?

Implementing a civilian flagger program - A civilian flagger program would create hundreds of well-paying union jobs for historically over-policed communities hit the hardest by unemployment amid the COVID-19 pandemic. To implement a citywide civilian flagger program, we will repeal Municipal Code 11-6.9e, which will create the legal ability for civilian flaggers to function within the city and collaborate with community organizers who call to redirect these jobs to the community.

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. Redirecting funding from police to fund other departments. The 2020 City budget attempted to reduce police overtime by 12 million dollars. The budget still allocates 48 million dollars for overtime. Other city departments are not permitted this level of overtime, and responsible fiscal oversight on the part of the city determines how staffing methods create the circumstances that result in such high levels of overtime. We can reallocate the funds that are currently being used to over police our communities to other departments.

Also, I would advocate to Shift Oversight of Grants. The Boston Police Department's lack of transparency regarding their community grants process has made it difficult to understand the scope, process, and impact of the millions of dollars they redistribute to community-based organizations. I commit to strengthening transparency by critically

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reviewing grants, working to move more funding that's decoupled from law enforcement directly into communities, and advocating that the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security shift control of the grants administration away from the Boston Police Department and into other city agencies or community-based organizations, expanding on Councilor Campbell's work.

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. Yes, I do believe that this is an issue that has been long ignored and, in recent years, has made its way to the public eye. To combat this, I would advocate for the necessary changes to be made to the police contract that would allow officers to be terminated when found out to be members of white supremacist organizations. Specifically, our contracts should leave decisions about whether or not an officer is fit to hold public office to the Commissioner instead of a binding arbitration process.

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?

Implement Traffic Calming Measures

Boston needs to prioritize road designs that benefit the environment and work for people walking, biking, driving, and using mobility devices. Making our neighborhoods safer and more walkable will positively impact our local economy and air quality by increasing foot traffic and reducing carbon emissions from transportation, which make up 30% of total emissions statewide. The city's plan to redesign Centre Street in West Roxbury is sound and balances the needs of the business community and abutting neighborhoods while prioritizing pedestrian safety. I will work to move this plan forward and collaborate with residents to determine the need for similar measures across the district.

Experiment with Car-Free Streets

Car-free districts allow micro-businesses to set up on sidewalks or in former parking spaces and become community spaces in neighborhoods where green space and other recreational

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facilities are scarce. West Roxbury has done this successfully with the Shannon Shootout and Jamaica Plain with World's Fair in Hyde Square. I will work with the Boston Transportation Department to identify streets that could close on weekends or become woonerfs and to develop an implementation plan involving Main Streets and the Offices of Arts & Culture and Neighborhood Services.

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?

Accelerate Decarbonization

In Boston, three percent of our buildings are responsible for fifty percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. If we want our city to be resilient in the face of climate change and arrive at our net-zero goal by 2050, we need to accelerate decarbonization by ensuring existing large buildings reach net-zero carbon emissions. I will update the BERDO ordinance to include the use of alternative compliance payments to subsidize small businesses, landlords, and Boston Housing Authority buildings to retrofit their facilities and get to net zero.

Support a Green Jobs Initiative

A robust green jobs initiative could expand employment opportunities for our youth and our residents who face barriers to employment. By implementing a paid training program, we can create work that will revitalize the neighborhoods these Bostonians call home through green infrastructure installation, climate-resilient design, natural spaces restoration, and community engagement. My support for Councilor Michelle Wu's proposal to ban the use of Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) for determination of eligibility for municipally supported jobs programs will ensure that these programs are delivered equitably.

Invest in Community Gardens

Every dollar invested in a community garden yields around \$6 in produce, or between \$500 and \$2,000 worth of fresh produce per family annually. I will work in conjunction with the Trustees, who currently manage 56 gardens across Boston, to explore where vacant lots can be converted into public community gardens in District 6.

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. Bus fares are paid mostly by low-income people - meaning this benefit would go directly to those who need it the most. Making most buses free on the T and every other public bus system in the state could be covered with a 2-cent gas tax increase, according to Livable Streets.

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

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Yes.

(H) Housing

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

Revise Our Housing Plan

If we want to house a changing city equitably, we need a housing plan based on our residents' real needs. Half of all new construction should be designated for tenants and homeowners, making 60% AMI or below, reflecting Boston residents' incomes. We will advocate for the funding we need and work to direct at least half of the housing funds from the recently passed increased linkage fees to housing for low-income residents with an income below 30% AMI. We will reduce land-use barriers by transforming zoning, deliver more permanent supportive and senior housing, include non-congregant shelter options, establish green standards for new housing, and expand City-funded rent subsidies, similar to Section 8.

Give Boston's Housing Need a Voice

We need our housing decision-making to better match the nature of our housing needs and to ensure racial, gender, and economic equity. More Black and Indigenous people, people of color, renters, women, lower-income and unhoused residents, seniors, and students should be represented in our housing decision-making bodies. I would support dedicated Housing Need Representation on the Zoning Board of Appeal and require representation in zoning hearings, Boston Planning and Development Agency meetings, and other deliberative sessions to empower and hear directly from people who would benefit from affordable housing.

Establish Anti-Displacement Zones

The COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis have compounded the threat of displacement for our neighbors. I will champion the passage of Article 91 of the City of Boston Zoning Code and establish anti-displacement overlays in high-risk neighborhoods, as an investment in a just recovery from the pandemic and an affirmation of the right to remain for Bostonian renters and homeowners. Anti-Displacement Zones will designate a new type of zoning district with unique standards and programs to give current residents a meaningful role in shaping their neighborhood's future.

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

Scale Up Community Land Trusts

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We need community land trusts at scale to make a difference in Boston's housing realities.

To do this, I will propose expanding the Department of Neighborhood Development to include an office dedicated to supporting Community Land Trusts. To further democratize housing in the city, we will increase the budget to double the number of units purchased

through the Acquisition Opportunity Program and double the per-unit subsidy for community land trusts.

- 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. The exemption threshold should be individual 5M, corporate 2 million.

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

Yes. In tandem with delivering more homes across Boston, we need regional coordination to re-establish rent control options for our city. In collaboration with our state representatives and neighboring towns and cities, I will champion legislation that stabilizes renters and landlords through 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. 50%.

- 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**

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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 do not believe this is the only course of action we need to take to increase accountability around development and solve our affordable housing crisis.

As far as how I am supportive of Councilor Michelle Wu's plan and would be more than happy to refine, champion, and work to implement it if I am elected to the city council.

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?

My entire economic policy is centered on creating a racially just economy. Specific policies I will champion include increasing youth jobs funding - Youth unemployment has spiked to historic levels during the COVID-19 pandemic, aggravating the already large racial disparities that persist in youth employment rates. Investing in youth jobs represents an investment in a more equitable economic future for young people and their families and a better-skilled labor force for the city. Funding youth jobs has also demonstrated an increase in community safety and a direct decrease in violence. We must Increase City funding for youth jobs to fund 1,000 school-year and 5,000 summer jobs, expand programming to fully include 14- to 22-year-olds and undocumented youth, and direct city funding to youth-serving community organizations.

I will support the expansion of Worker-Owned Businesses because closing the racial wealth gap will require that we use an equity lens and further our economy's democratization. Expanding the equity initiatives for worker-owned businesses, especially those owned by Black folks, people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ workers, will ensure marginalized communities have equal access and opportunity to build wealth. With this in mind, I will advocate for the expansion of the City's Worker Cooperative Initiative to provide grants, loans, and technical and procurement assistance to start-up worker co-ops. This will also bolster support for current businesses who want to transition into a worker-owned model and companies offering employee stock ownership plans (ESOP).

I will work to strengthen Gig Worker Protections. Boston must take action to ensure that

workers' rights are centered in our economic policy by strengthening enforcement of worker protections. In addition to City contractors, I will extend the Living Wage Ordinance to subcontractors and independent contractors. With the expansion of the ordinance, misclassified workers would receive an additional wage premium to cover denied benefits due to misclassification. We will create a Gig Worker Advisory Board to convene stakeholders, set the minimum acceptable wage and benefit standards, direct the Wage Theft & Living Wage Division to investigate whether these companies pay workers the state minimum wage of \$13.50, and build a coalition of municipal leaders to develop a framework for strengthening worker rights across the city lines.

I will support the Chuck Turner Jobs Act which builds upon his decades of work to create a more equitable Boston. I will sponsor the Act, which includes but is not limited to creating Community Stabilization Areas and Committees for any neighborhood where the median income is under \$34,000. These neighborhoods will be targeted for special programs, including, but not limited to, First Source Hiring programs, training on employee rights, and access to quality jobs.

- 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)?**

Union labor is important and this is one of the ways we can ensure marginalized communities have access to well-paying union jobs. The BJRP has been successful in many ways. There is a need to strengthen the accountability mechanism to ensure that developers and contractors are adhering to the policy. I work collaboratively with unions, developers, and other contractors to create an accountability process that ensures Boston residents are benefiting from the growth the City is experiencing.

- 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?**

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Expanding the equity initiatives in the City contracting and procurement process to include worker-owned businesses and organizations, especially those owned by Black folks, people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ workers, will ensure these communities have equal access and opportunity to build wealth. This is why I support the demands of the Boston Economic Council of Massachusetts. I will set spending goals of 15% for Black-owned businesses and a combined 40% for women- and minority-owned businesses, including LGBTQ+ owners, and direct all City departments and quasi-city agencies to unbundle large contracts set to become available in 2021. In addition to the spending goals, I will expand support to these businesses by ensuring they can access legal assistance when navigating the application process while streamlining and simplifying it.

- 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?**

Host community agreements allow businesses to open, currently, it is tied to a physical location. In order to get a host community agreement, you have to have a physical location. I would explore the possibility of having the host community agreement tied to an individual/business owner. In general, I think that city is doing a decent job with equity in the Cannabis industry. I will work to build a coalition of officials to expunge all cannabis-related convictions.

- 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.

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- 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?**

Boston must be committed to strengthening our democracy and this includes how we structure our municipal voting districts. It is critical that we do so without gerrymandering including practices like cracking which spreads like-minded voters apart across multiple districts to dilute their voting power in each. This denies the group representation in multiple districts. The other practice we must avoid is packing which concentrates like-minded voters together in one district to reduce their voting power in other districts. This gives the group representation in a single district while denying them representation across districts.

- 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