

2021 Boston City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Ruthzee Louijeune

Office Sought: Boston City Council At-Large

Website: www.RuthzeeForBoston.com

Facebook: RuthzeeForBoston

Twitter: @Ruthzee4Boston

Instagram: RuthzeeForBoston

(A) Your Candidacy

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

Homeownership – closing the racial wealth gap and creating community stability among working class families through; first-generation homeownership grant programs targeting communities that historically experienced blockbusting and redlining; increasing and advancing timing of payments to the city by commercial and residential developers to fund affordable housing and homeownership; and using public land for the development of affordable housing and homeownership.

Education – support a hybrid or fully elected school committee; robust funding for pre-K and early college access programs for students; emotional and tangible support for students experiencing homelessness; extended support and smaller classrooms for vulnerable populations; promote our schools with an assets-based approach.

City Contracts – Break down contracts to make small, local, Black, and LatinX businesses more competitive in the procurement process. Given the recent disparity study, Boston has the legal basis to increase procurement goals for minority and women owned businesses.

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

I am a child of Boston. I am woven into the rich, diverse, and struggling communities I seek to represent, and I'll hit the ground running on the issues that working class Bostonians are facing. As a Harvard-trained attorney, I've represented tenants and homeowners facing displacement. I ran a weekly eviction clinic to help tenants without legal representation complete paperwork to

preserve their legal rights. I've worked on an education committee in City Hall to improve education outcomes for all of our students, with the perspective of being a BPS graduate myself. I served as Senior Counsel for Senator Warren advocating for progressive values, and I work with community groups to solve the city's systemic issues of affordable housing, homeownership, and food insecurity. I'm trilingual and care about building an inclusive city. I'm excited to bring my skills and passion as the first Haitian person elected to City Council.

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

I've been following Chelsea and Stockton's experiments with the provision of a basic guaranteed income - in partnership with philanthropic efforts - to break cycles of poverty and reduce the stress levels for those most in need. So far, the research out of Stockton appears promising on the overall positive effects on recipients without dissuading them from participating in the workforce.

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 & the police union, Boston Police Patrolmen's Association. [*Edited 6/16/21*]

First, I reject the notion that contributions I receive will have any impact on who I give access to and whose voice I elevate. My campaign centers the needs of working class Bostonians, and I'll do that regardless of who contributes. My reality is that I exist in this city as a Black woman with a large number of working class family and family friends who, like me, were born and raised here, and are immigrants or from immigrant families trying their best to make it. They got jobs in spaces and industries that are rightfully under tremendous scrutiny amid calls for institutional change. They are also tremendously proud of my candidacy. My younger sister, for example, is a prosecutor under DA Rollins. I pledge not to host any industry-based fundraisers for any mentioned group.

(B) Racial Equity & Community Engagement

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

Testifying before the Boston City Council and the Attorney General's office about a downtown business's racist practices denying business to me and other Black patrons. A fine was levied against them, we received an apology, and the employees were forced to attend anti-discrimination programming. This is the work that is needed to ensure a city that feels and is welcoming and inclusive to all.

Worked on racial gerrymandering and voting rights cases before the Supreme Court to expand the right to vote and ensure that Black communities had representation of their choice and weren't having their political power diluted.

Worked on and am working on anti-displacement and homeownership efforts with City Life / Vida Urbana and the Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance. Any time I was able to keep a person in their home and prevent an eviction – especially for a BIPOC person – I was advancing the cause of racial justice.

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?

As the daughter of immigrants, a woman, and a Black person, making sure that we are centering the voices of our diverse communities is at the heart of what I'm about. I've led interfaith events. I've ensured that Spanish- and Creole- speaking residents can access unemployment and food resources despite language barriers. I work to be a connector - even when I do not have an answer to questions at my fingertips, I'll reach out to my network for support. I believe in inclusivity – as a personal practice and a facet of any effective and responsive government. I am accessible and open, regardless of perceived differences. We can improve language access and create more citizen boards that draw from our diverse neighborhoods and ensure feedback loops so that diverse community members can ensure that their participation in the civic process is not performative but pushing needed change in City Hall.

(C) Charter Reform & Balance of Power

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

City Councilors legislate change by way of orders, ordinances, and resolutions, and amendments to the municipal code. City Council promotes reform and transparency, and councilors act as liaisons between City Hall and constituents while responding to their questions and need for resources. Although Boston is a strong-mayor system, the power of the bully pulpit is real. City Councilors can and must critique the Mayor when executive policies and practices cause harm to residents. The City Council can – and should - also seek to amend the charter to allow for more power-sharing, which increases accountability and responsiveness to constituents. The City Council represents the city and should be reflective of its diversity, which drives a more inclusive and equitable city government.

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.

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

State law unfortunately makes it abundantly difficult to amend the city charter – which is something I would like to identify ways to address – but to the extent the City Council is able to use the current authority and referendum process to alter the City Charter, I support the following changes as a non-exhaustive list: Give authority to City Council to create budget line items and to propose its own budget that incorporates and is led by community feedback; remove ability of City Councilors to raise their own salary; provide more ability to exact fees via home rule petition

(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?**

Increased fees on Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) such as Uber

Revamping the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program - for example basing payment amounts off of 2021 tax assessment.

Create public private partnerships to raise in-kind funding from these institutions, including summertime partnerships for BPS students or allowing BPS students to take college classes for free.

Supporting a real estate transfer tax for properties worth more than \$2,000,000

Conduct a study, in partnership with outside institutions, to determine what other measures can be defined as fees that fall within the city' purview.

(E) Education

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

Use an assets-based language to discuss schools that are struggling academically to avoid creating a culture and external perception of failure. It's important to find the success stories within each school and elevate those.

Institute a hybrid or fully-elected school committee

Use and request more state funding to: Reduce class sizes; hire more guidance counselors to reduce student ratio; and invest in training programs to support school leadership in effort to reduce turnover

Invest in universal Pre-K

Work towards the goal of having a library in each school, especially each elementary school, and partner with local libraries to underscore the adventures and possibilities of reading

Provide more resources to students with disabilities, and de-concentrate their presence in a handful of schools

Allow for more PILOT schools and programs to allow for creativity

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. A hybrid structure allows for power-sharing and greater accountability, while accounting for the issue of low name-recognition in municipal elections and potential for capture by private interests. A hybrid model would have: 2 members appointed by the mayor, 2 members appointed by the City Council, and 3 elected members, together with 2 BPS students with voting power. That said, I am open to a fully elected school committee.

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. As a proud Boston Latin School graduate (Class of 2004!), I support an admissions process that places less emphasis on the exam and includes equitable considerations of geographic diversity, socioeconomic diversity, family income and education. I support the federal court's ruling upholding the temporary admissions policy, and I support the work currently being done

by the Boston School Committee Exam Schools Admissions Task Force and have been in touch with one of the members about their work.

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

I would use unrestricted grant money from the state to fund universal pre-K, together with partnerships with philanthropy. I would also expand partnerships with center-based programs and family-based centers to make universal pre-K a reality using a mix of state federal dollars. Of the \$400 million we received from the federal government, some of those funds should go to making universal Pre-K a reality.

(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. 10%. We also need to focus on the purpose of the overtime. There are different buckets where officers can accrue overtime: ongoing "emergency" investigations, public safety at events, court appearances, and details. We should eliminate details, and we should define what constitutes a "court appearance." Delivering evidence is not a court appearance unless preparing a case with the assigned prosecutor.

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

Mandatory use of body-worn cameras during all shifts including overtime and mandatory identification as police officer (badge and ID number)

Limit kinds of overtime (no overtime pay for functions including: transporting people in custody, delivering drugs/evidence)

Reduce minimum staffing levels

Participate in mandatory vicarious trauma training. Officers are human and get exposed to traumatic situations by nature of their work. That trauma likely impacts their everyday decision-making. Vicarious trauma training can improve thoughtful performance. .

Shift work from police officers to a civilian team or City Hall office where possible, including, construction sites, police detail, and traffic infractions

Create a zero-tolerance list for actions that will lead to immediate termination

Increased data tracking on use of force incidents

Maintain ban on use of biometrics and facial recognition technology which exorbitantly discriminates against BIPOC communities.

Eliminate gang and bike unit.

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?

Explore construction sites and police detail as civilian job opportunities, and work with the Office of Police Accountability and Transparency (OPAT) and community members to decide the best governance structure.

Ensure that non-emergency 311 calls are not rerouted to police, and send behavioral health and medical professionals to respond to 911 calls involving nonviolent people experiencing mental health crises or substance use issues, working in partnership with the Office of Health and Human Services.

Reassign most traffic enforcement to separate traffic agencies that are independent from the police. There would be exceptions for violations that involve certain crimes that police would still investigate, like driving a stolen vehicle or hit-and-run incidents.

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. 10%

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. Swiftly remove anyone from the force who appears at a white supremacist event or is part of such an investigation by instituting a zero-tolerance policy

Have officers sign a statement annually stating that they are not members of, nor are they sympathetic to, the efforts of white supremacist organizations

Improve applicant and employee screening to screen out officers who are sympathetic to far-right and supremacist groups and who are approaching policing from a supremacist lens

Provide incentives to officers for reporting racist misconduct of other officers, and investigate these reports.

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?

We need to make the T more accessible and make our roads safer for bikes. We need to invest in infrastructure in our roads to provide dedicated bus lanes and better public transportation infrastructure. We must redesign our streets to be more inclusive of different transportation modes, but we must do so equitably, especially in neighborhoods that do not currently have many public transportation options. We can increase our bikeshares, continue to explore micro-mobility options like use of scooters. Strengthening our transportation infrastructure so that residents in all neighborhoods have accessible or low-cost travel options is critical to building a city less dependent on car ownership.

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?

A free MBTA would go a long way in changing behavior - reducing fossil-fuel pollution from cars and incentivizing the use of public transit.

Given that Boston is a heat-trapped city, we need to protect our trees (like the mature trees along Melnea Cass that were in danger of being removed), especially when new development is happening. To reduce the urban heat island effect, we need to use more city land for community gardens and green spaces free of asphalt and cement, especially in Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan.

Continue to work on neighborhood-specific coastal flooding plans, and to support a local Green New Deal that sees climate justice as economic and racial justice, thereby focusing on new union jobs for the working class that pay a living wage.

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, We need to start by making the buses free, and work towards making the trains free as well. MBTA fares are regressive and have a disproportionate impact on our essential, low-wage workers, who are often Black and LatinX. I support working alongside our federal Massachusetts lawmakers for the federal government to help fund free transit, which will also have a net benefit in tackling climate change. With a free T, we would save the close to \$1 billion it costs just to collect fares, and we can reinvest that money in our infrastructure. Boston should have a dedicated seat on the Fiscal and Management Control Board, the MBTA's oversight board, given that Boston is so important and impacted by the system. We should also explore increasing revenue received from Transportation Network Companies to help fund a free T.

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?

Increase IDP from 13% to at least 20% to match the rate of neighboring cities in Greater Boston.

Increase Linkage so the Neighborhood Housing Trust has funding for affordable housing (so that the Neighborhoods Job Trust has funding for job training programs)

Decrease the 100,000 square foot exemption for Linkage

Expedite schedule for receipt of Linkage payments so development of affordable housing happens quicker

Use money from a revamped PILOT program to fund housing stabilization

Increase partnerships with non-profits to make homeownership more of a reality for working class, first-generation homebuyers

Expand CPA funding for housing

Increase and publicize property tax assistance and write-offs for seniors.

Update outdated zoning code

Listen to demands of tenant organizing groups

Push state for access to counsel in eviction-related proceedings for non-owner-occupied buildings and for property owners with three or more properties or five or more rental units, regardless of the number of properties.

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

Partner with community land trusts and limited equity cooperatives to offer alternative and affordable cooperative models of renting and homeownership

Transfer control of public land from BPDA back to fully being within the purview of City Hall through the Property Management Department and the Department of Neighborhood Development (DND)

Make city land available to smaller builders at low or no cost on the condition that homes or units built are affordable, and in partnership with community development corporations (CDCs).

Streamline permitting process for small- to medium-sized builders.

Identify and have a singular database for all city-owned land parcels that is easily accessible online, together with any and all requests for development.

Ensure a balance between expanding affordable housing and preserving green space.

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 transfer tax of 2%..

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

Yes. Boston should adopt reasonable rent stabilization measures. When the statewide ban went into place in 1994, Boston voters overwhelmingly supported rent control then, and they still do. It's imperative to protect tenants from a speculative market, especially as we come out of the

pandemic. Under my plan, owner-occupied properties would be exempt from rent control. DND would establish a rent control board to determine the precise nature of the rent control policy. I would place the upper threshold on rent increases at 5-7% every year or the increase in the consumer price index, for elderly, disabled, and low-and moderate-income tenants. I would explore exempting new developments from the rent control requirement, so the policy is aimed at community stabilization for current residents and does not fully stymie the city's growth. I would institute a review process prior to any condominium conversion for properties that come under the rent control guidelines.

- 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, what? Please List %**

Yes. At least 20%.

- 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. Like most major cities, Boston must separate its planning department from its development department to prevent conflict of interests and to prevent rubber-stamping developer plans. Ideas to do so are:

Empower independent office to create a master city plan that incorporates and is driven by community feedback;

Ensure a climate resiliency and racial equity overlay;

Consolidate the functions of city agencies in the permitting and approval process;

Dedicate compliance staff in planning agency to work with development agency to ensure execution on city's master plan;

Create a 22-member community council representing Boston's neighborhoods, made up of homeowners and renters without a financial stake in the development industry

Task the independent planning office to work with DND and/or the Property Management Department to ensure that public land is being used as a public good and in alignment with the city's master plan

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?

Lease public land at little to no cost to new non-profits (started within the last 10 years or new non-profits) working in low-income census tracts to provide empowering opportunities for youth employment and/or community gathering areas.

Create welcoming and inclusive spaces for young BIPOC residents to prevent Boston's brain drain of young professional talent and foster an environment for networking and culturally-relevant city programming.

Fix procurement process to make it more accessible and attainable for Black and LatinX businesses, currently shut out

Center the work and recommendations of the newly-formed Equity Cabinet

Support current efforts for a participatory budget process

Ensure job training programs are matching the jobs that currently exist on the market, and partnering with vocational schools and Building Pathways program

Match students in vocational schools with promising internship opportunities for future employment

Increase grants and support for small and locally-owned businesses opening in low-income census tracts

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)?**

Implementing Access and Opportunity Committees citywide,

Offering benefits during the procurement process to contractors who have a history of meeting the goals;

Providing each contractor with the "Finishing the Job" manual about how to meet the goals:
<https://policygroupontradeswomen.org/resources-2/>.

The City stands behind the fallacy that punishing subcontractors for not meeting the goals will expose themselves to costly litigation. However, the city has not yet experimented with rewarding contractors who comply with BJRP. Shifting from a model of sanctions to benefits could change subcontractors' and construction managers' incentive to meet and exceed the goals.

We must ensure that Bostonians, especially BIPOC and women, are hired across all trades, not just unskilled trades. The City must continue to monitor safety on construction sites given the disparate impact of construction worksite accidents on BIPOC workers the past year.

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 institute a target of 25% for BIPOC-owned businesses, with a target of 15% to Black-owned businesses.

Reduce barriers to entry by simplifying RFP process

Have more diverse staff deciding on city contracts

Reduce favoritism towards long-established companies

Working with the Equity Cabinet; require each city department to conduct assessment of future needs for goods and services, and partnering with and communicating city procurement opportunities in outreach efforts to small businesses.

Create a supplier diversity program

Learn lessons from the Omni Hotel Project, where MassPort succeeded in contracting with BIPOC-owned business

Require Regular public reporting and assessment of whether targets are being met

Streamline certification process for business to reduce barriers to entry.

- 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?**

First, people with low-level marijuana offenses as a matter of law should have their past convictions cleaned from their record. The City should create an incubator for “equity applicants” where they not only get priority in applying for licenses but are offered business classes and interest-free loans from revenue generated by dispensaries. Currently the expungement process is long and complex. Since courthouses are partially closed due to COVID 19, another layer of complexity has been added. We need to amend the legislation to allow past low-level marijuana convictions to be expunged. The City needs to give equity applicants help beyond the licensing process. While licensing is an important part of the process, applicants face many barriers before getting to that phase including access to funding and learning about the business process. With an incubator, the city can give potential applicants access to the funding and training to get them started.

- 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 is one that includes:

Compliance with the Voting Rights Act

Heightened efforts at community engagement at public hearings and through a public comment process that targets BIPOC communities, often underrepresented in such processes

Non-partisanship as its objection

Respecting natural boundaries

Compactness and contiguity

No deference to incumbency protection

Cohesion and communities of interest

Special attention to voting rights and access of BIPOC communities

Resources printed in the main languages spoken in the city to promote language access

Ensuring that there is human review of technology (GIS) used to draw 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

I am committed to a progressive agenda that pushes my hometown in the only possible direction; forward. I wholeheartedly believe in listening to community members to determine what we need to do to make Boston more equitable, more inclusive, and a more prosperous city for all of us, not just the wealthy. I believe that community organizations are the true levers and spaces for change, and that fundamental change happens from the ground up. I have the requisite skill, passion for community, and expansive network to navigate the complexities of City Hall bureaucracy to advance the cause of justice – whether that be housing as a human right, language access, city contracts, championing our unions, equity in education, or a more inclusive city planning and budget process. There's a lot of work to do, and I am prepared to hit the ground running on behalf of all of us.

