

2021 Boston City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Julia Mejia

Office Sought: Boston City Councilor At-Large

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(A) Your Candidacy

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

- a. Civic engagement & government, accessibility, accountability, and transparency
- b. Small business - creating avenues specifically around capital access and workforce development.
- c. Public Education/Youth engagement - Specifically addressing the Opportunity Gap/School to Prison Pipeline, social-emotional wellness, and violence prevention

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

I ran for City Councilor in 2019 because I believe that our City's government should include people from all of the different walks of life that it represents. Like many residents in the City of Boston, I am an immigrant. I was born in the Dominican Republic and arrived in the neighborhood of Dorchester when I was five years old. I was raised by a single mother who was undocumented for most of my childhood. At a young age, I began advocating on behalf of my mother and others who felt ignored and underserved by the very institutions that were supposed to serve them.

I am a proud graduate of the Boston Public schools and was the first in my family to graduate high school and college. I am also the first to purchase a home and live in Dorchester with my family. My experiences growing up in Boston led me to become an entrepreneur and a voice for social justice. I created and led a civic engagement group

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focused on voter registration, founded a nonprofit education network, and worked on national social justice campaigns as a producer for MTV.

Since being sworn in to represent the people of Boston, I have hit the ground running as a voice for ALL residents of the City of Boston, specifically amplifying the voices of those in predominantly Black and Brown communities who traditionally have been excluded from the decision making bodies. My first action on the City Council floor called for the creation of Sanctuary Safe Spaces in the City of Boston. Since then, my office has shaken up the way business is done in City Hall by taking a community-centered approach through legislative action, economic empowerment, youth engagement, and more. We have engaged with over 1,000 people through policy conversations over the past year and have held more than 50 events. I am proud to share that our city's youth played a strong role in the previous statistics. My office has sponsored Youth-Led Town Halls, fought for a youth voice on the Civilian Review Board, and held weekly youth-led mental health check-ins during the pandemic so that our city's youth could talk through what they were going through as they experienced COVID alongside the rest of us.

When the pandemic hit we went to work in new ways and transitioned our constituent engagement to online avenues including Zoom and Facebook. We partnered with local banks and nonprofits to provide \$450,000 in relief funds to constituents and 80 small business owners who were struggling during the shutdown. A few of the programs we launched during the pandemic included:

- a. The Bodega Project that created a city-wide voucher program ensuring families had access to local, culturally competent foods.
- b. An Elder Food Program that partnered with local restaurants and nonprofits to deliver hot meals to the doors of seniors across the city.
- c. An Essential Employees Lives Matter Project that provided essential employees with hot meals after late shifts.
- d. A Business Recovery Pilot Program for beauty salons and barbershops in the City of Boston to help them rebuild.
- e. and a Learning Pod Program that created learning pods for students in Boston so they could learn alongside their peers safely and healthily.
- f. In May we are launching a mental wellness program designed to support hair salons and barbershops to respond to the impact of trauma COVID has had on communities of color. The goal is for staff to educate, engage and connect their clients to trauma-informed supports.

My team and I are now working to help ensure an equitable vaccine distribution in Boston

and have nearly 2,000 community members receive their vaccinations. I am eager to continue the work we have begun and help the residents of Boston come out of this pandemic with the tools they need to recover and rebuild.

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 expand voting access in municipal elections. I have worked with youth leaders to lower the voting age to 16. I filed a home rule petition to enable Boston to determine for itself what voices we want to be incorporated in municipal policymaking. Our young people will be inheriting the city that we are creating now. They deserve to have a voice in shaping what that will look like.

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. I will reject all of the above with the understanding that I have friends and family, primarily Black and Latinx employees that work in these institutions who want to support my campaign. I will accept donations from them because for me, support from Black and brown voters matters.

(B) Racial Equity & Community Engagement

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

a. Residential Kitchen Ordinance: On March 31, 2021, the Boston City Council passed an ordinance and a text amendment that seeks to make it legal for people to prepare foods in their homes for retail profit, sponsored by our office. This issue came about when Andree, a Brighton resident, reached out to our office to share his frustration that he could not prepare food items in his home for retail profit. We shared his frustration, and around six months later we passed the law that would allow Andree and hundreds of other residents to start a small business in their home.

b. Language Access: Our office held a hearing on language access services in 2020, the first hearing to ever be offered with simultaneous interpretation in multiple languages. Since then, we have worked with the Administration as well as numerous language access advocates, including the APIs CAN, on an ordinance that we are currently perfecting through the Working Session process. This ordinance establishes that:

- every department in the City of Boston is required to roll out a language access plan that accommodates the needs of residents who speak languages other than English.
- all necessary documents are made available in the major languages spoken in Boston.
- departments can accommodate constituents who require interpretation on the spot ensuring that community meetings are made available in multiple languages depending on the community.
- creates a city employee interpretation volunteer pool which compiles all of the city employees certified to be able to assist with interpretation and translation.

c. Civil Review Board/Youth Advocacy: Our office partnered with City Council colleagues and police reform advocates to create a Civilian Review Board that seeks to hold our law enforcement officials accountable. During that process, we fought for a youth delegate to be appointed to the Civilian Review Board, and to make sure that that is a paid position. We want to center youth experiences in the dialogue around police reform and make sure that they are paid for their time.

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?

I am proud that all our work since taking office has centered and amplified community access and input. When fireworks were an ever-present issue in neighborhoods across the city, we convened a town hall to bring people together to formulate solutions that didn't criminalize our neighbors. We prioritized educating residents about how the city budget works and where they have the power to advocate. We held a People's Budget Town Hall to ensure that our office advocated for the demands of the residents when we went into budget discussions with the Mayor's office. Finally, we had 50 community conversations about the myriad issues facing our residents with an emphasis on youth-led conversations.

(C) Charter Reform & Balance of Power

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

Under our current structure, the most important role we play as City Councilor is making our municipal government more transparent and accountable to our residents. The City acts on behalf of the people and people should have more power to hold the mayor accountable. It is also our role to engage all of the residents of Boston to ensure they know how the City can support them in their lives.

**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?**

I am supporting the additional changes Councilor Edwards is advancing to give the City Council the same budgetary authority as the Mayor. The more we distribute power, the more inclusive our decision-making can be.

(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?**

We must be intentional, with an eye to equity as we distribute the CARES funds we are receiving from the federal government. There are revenue opportunities both with an expanded luxury tax as well supporting the Fair Share Amendment at the state level. Finally, I am supportive of Councilor Edwards' ordinance to create accountability measures concerning PILOT payments.

(E) Education

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

a. We have heard from the community that there is a serious need to invest more of our city's dollars into services for students with special needs and students who are English Language Learners. We have also heard directly from the community regarding the need to invest more funding for school infrastructure.

b. Our office co-hosted a hearing to talk about digital inequity in our city. Access to the internet is segregated in our City, with internet access and quality noticeably dipping in

communities like Mattapan, Hyde Park, and certain parts of Dorchester. This greatly impacts students, when the pandemic hit it exacerbated the learning loss of students.

c. Our office held hearings on suspension on MCAS this year due to COVID as well as ending exam school process

d. I believe we need to expand access to vocational-technical education at every school.

e. I will continue the work I have spent years championing expanding parent engagement at every school in Boston. We need to make sure that parent meetings are at times low-wage workers can attend, that translation and child care are provided as well as ensure that parent voice is integrated into school and district-level decisions.

f. As the Chair of Workforce Development, I joined the Madison Park Program Advisory Board to leverage my networks and support the creation of a solid pipeline for career explorations for students. My goal is to increase paid internships for students as a pathway to build their skills and portfolios. This includes ensuring that we are building with black and brown students in mind.

g. I have been meeting with students from various schools regarding their building conditions and incorporating their testimonies about their schools such as the Greenwood, McKay, Blackstone & others into my public hearings.

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

Yes. I believe we should move to a fully elected committee that includes a seat for a youth representative with full voting rights and pay as adults. While I believe a structure similar to how the City Council is currently structured with both district and at-large seats, we would like the community to have a say in what the new structure should look like before seats go up for election.

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.

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 need to take a more holistic approach and address factors of systemic racism in Boston and recognize the fact that to get into an exam school- benefits who can afford tutoring for the exam. The entire problem with the existence of the exams is the segregation of students into silos. While we work to build more equity across all of our schools, I support the proposal put forward by the Exam School Admission Task Force where admission is based on grades and students in every zip code are guaranteed admission to each of the three exam schools.

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

We need to be looking at education as a continuum and work collectively with the various levels of government that oversee the pre-k - college education in Boston. For pre-K, this is primarily the realm of state legislators to fund and oversee early childhood education. I will continue to advocate for funding more pre-K seats for our Boston children and working with legislators to remove barriers that exist for our providers.

(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. Yes and our office is currently updating and strengthening the Trust Act alongside community voices and national leaders.

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

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Yes. Yes, shouldn't be based on salary but hours worked. It's a mental health issue for the officers and the community.

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 believe the City Council should be a participant in the contract negotiations to expand transparency. In addition, I believe the construction detail jobs should not be under the BPD but should be offered as civilian jobs. Our office is looking forward to working with the newly formed OPAT office to ensure accountability and transparency in all disciplinary actions.

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?

We filed an ordinance alongside Councilors Wu and Edwards last Jun to divert non-violent emergency calls to non-police members potentially housed with the Boston Health Commission or Office of Recovery Services. Since then, Mayor Janey has implemented a pilot program to explore diverting non-violent emergency calls to non-police members. We helped to influence this conversation in the City of Boston.

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. During the last budget session, I advocated for a reallocation of 15% of the BPD budget to be directed to programs and services that directly serve our communities. I will continue to advocate for that in the coming months as well as during my next term.

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, we wrote a letter to the Commissioner (both White and the new Commissioner) which got covered in the papers. We also filed a hearing order alongside Councilor Campbell which, among other things, sought to seek greater accountability for officers who may have been at the Jan. 6 riots.

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

Yes. Yes, the only way that I will wholeheartedly support safe consumption sites is with strong oversight, resources, and tools to ensure we are dealing with the issue from a recovery standpoint. I intend to convene community discussions around solutions that center the needs of those living in the Mass/Cass neighborhood especially those that are often made to bear the brunt of policymakers that refuse to fully support our community members including those that are unhoused and those that use drugs.

(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?**

Yes. I plan to continue the work that we have begun. I believe we have to continue to explore where, when and how public transit is provided across the city. We held a hearing on bringing back the late-night T service, which would greatly eliminate a lot of the third shift working class's reliance on cars. I will continue this work to fight to have expanded service at night. I will continue to advocate for expanding service to neighborhoods such as Mattapan, whose residents are forced to rely on less frequent service.

- 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?**

All of my work has equity at the center. #Allmeansall permeates everything we do. I have fought continuously in the budget process to ensure that our climate resilience contracting goes towards Black and Brown firms because climate resilience needs to include racial resilience as well. We have shown vocal support for communities fighting back against projects that don't respect climate resilience nor the communities these projects are being built in (i.e. East Boston Substation)

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

Yes.

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

Yes. I support the pilot program started by Mayor Janey. I will fight to ensure that it remains and can expand.

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

Yes.

(H) Housing

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

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Currently, Impact Advisory groups are composed of people well connected to the development process. Community groups are engaged after decisions are made and information is presented but not negotiated. If we are to address the growing displacement and gentrification happening across the city, we do that by ensuring that those most directly impacted by planning and development are involved in decision-making from the beginning.

Our office has begun the process of creating a citywide community-centered effort that brings residents from across experiences to create a Housing Planning Bill of Rights that centers the voices of those who are directly impacted by the planning & development policies. The goal is to create a structure that ALL #allmeansall projects across the city will adhere to. We are also working with the Boston Jobs Coalition and their efforts to ensure that our Boston-based workforce can afford to live in the city they keep running.

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

There are vacant, city-owned lots across the city. These lots are concentrated in Dorchester, Mattapan, and Roxbury. These open lots are the results of redlining, white flight, and arson during the 70's that many blocks are struggling to recover from to this day. We can make intentional policy decisions that will help slow gentrification and expand access to housing for people currently at risk of displacement. There is an opportunity to engage residents in these communities, where housing is becoming increasingly out of reach for our low-wage workers, to envision and build housing resources based on the needs of current residents, not just developers and speculative buyers.

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 support Councilor Edwards's proposal which would allow the city to place a tax of up to 6 percent on all real estate transactions over \$2 million.

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

Yes. When the rent control measure failed to pass the statehouse, it was driven by suburban opposition. A recent poll shows that over 70% of Boston voters support rent control. Cities and towns should be allowed to craft housing policies that meet the needs of their residents. I would support bill H 1378/S.886 which has just been advanced to the Housing Committee in the State House.

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%. Yes, the housing crisis in Boston has only gotten worse since I first ran for office. I continue to believe we need BOLD action to help ensure that people can afford to stay in their neighborhoods. I will continue to advocate for a 50% IDP in our housing plans.

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. We should create a structure that is community-centered and led that includes representation across race and socioeconomic status to ensure that all voices are involved in the planning and development process. If we want to ensure the longevity of Boston, we need to make sure that our young people can afford to stay here and build their lives. This will require that young people are involved in the decision-making processes that impact the future trajectory of the City.

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 am proud of the work that our office has done to advance the important work of closing the racial wealth gap. The recently passed resident kitchen ordinance, which will help individuals generate income and eliminate the massive barrier of access to capital to open commercial kitchens. We are working with Madison Park High School to develop a career exploration pipeline for students to secure paid internships throughout the city in their area of interest. We are also going to be launching a literacy task force to explore ways to expand literacy in adults and students to ensure that those struggling with literacy are still about to achieve economic prosperity. Finally, we are filing an ordinance to address commercial vacancies. COVID has laid bare the many barriers facing small businesses and the impact of small business closures due to COVID shutdowns have disproportionately impacted Black and Brown business owners. We also wrote a resolution calling on a moratorium on commercial evictions.

- 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)?**

I believe enforcement requires both creating a more transparent reporting system and enforceable penalties for contractors and subcontractors that fail to adhere to the BJRP. Our office will introduce a proposal to require contractors who are found to fail to meet the requirements of the BJRP, have a freeze put on their ability to be awarded new contracts.

- 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 support the work that has been done by the Boston Economic Council of Massachusetts. These include:

- i. Immediately setting spending goals of 15% for Black-owned businesses and a combined 40% for women- and minority-owned businesses.

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ii. Immediately remove from their positions the Chief Financial Officer and Corporation Counsel, all of who have been stumbling blocks to progress. Immediately enacting policy tying performance evaluations, compensation, bonuses, and future employment for all cabinet-level positions, department heads, procurement officers, and other staff across citywide departments to achieving equity and diversity goals.

iii. Immediately directing all City departments and quasi-city agencies to unbundle large contracts that are set to become available in 2021 and beyond.

iv. Immediately make the Equity and Inclusion Unit an independent entity with strong enforcement and oversight powers and a full staff that allows the monitoring of all projects across the city and spending across all departments, including quasi-city agencies.

- 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?**

We are currently working with groups to explore why cannabis stores are prevented from being located within 1/2 mile of schools while liquor stores do not have that same barrier. Access to capital continues to be the biggest barrier. The wealth gap in Boston means that white applicants have far greater access to both personal wealth and greater access to capital. The city needs to take an active role in expanding the availability of capital to potential owners from communities that for generations have been impacted by the “war on drugs.” We must ensure there is true accountability and transparency in regards to access to capital so that Black and brown owners are the true owners of their establishments and predatory loan agreements from large multi-state organizations are prevented.

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

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Yes. And we should start in communities including Mattapan that are currently not adequately or equitably served by broadband services.

(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. Not only do I support it, but our office also filed a Home Rule Petition which seeks to lower the voting age for municipal elections to 16. Our office partnered with young advocates from across the City to write this home rule petition so that the entire process was youth-led.

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

Whatever the process looks like, it needs to center the voices of those who have historically not been able to access government, including immigrants, the elderly, and young people. We want to see community forums held specifically in languages other than English so that the Chinese community, the Vietnamese community, the Haitian community, etc. all have the opportunity to pitch in. Language access is going to be critical. We need redistricting that acknowledges the generational shifts in our demographics. We are a majority POC city and we need districts that represent that. I will amplify the work of advocates who are already on the ground pushing for more equitable redistricting (Mass Voter Table, Lawyers for Civil Rights, etc.)

- 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

If you missed our Year In Review Presentation, where we highlight our work during our first year in of ice, please check it out below:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/192argWDQAo1uri4O1kQ1VWHcimXM1h_vy9AjsJMjzi4/edit?usp=sharing

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