

# 2021 Boston City Council Candidate Questionnaire

## Josette Williams

**Office Sought:** Boston City Council, District 4

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### **(A) Your Candidacy**

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

1. Reactivating my district by providing countless and varied ways for my neighbors to see how they fit in the civic process and helping them see that their vote is their voice.

2. Helping my district recover from the past year - both economically and socially-emotionally - emphasis on job creation, affordable and high-quality childcare options for families, and high-quality, accessible mental health supports for the whole family

3. Working with the residents of D4 to rethink what we need to be able to stay in this community we love. How can we create actual affordable housing options that meet families where they are now?

#### **2. What qualifies you to hold this office?**

My ability to connect and build with everyone I meet, combined with my 30+ years community organizing and building capacity with families in this city, whether it was through Roca, the health and human services field, or in the early childhood sphere in the Boston Public Schools where I have worked the last 10 years. In addition, the fact that I raised my daughter in a village of social capital and got her to her first year of college this year at Northeastern!

People trust me. I do not say what people want to hear. I speak from the heart. I live joyfully despite what I have been through.

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

Local Reparations Restorative Housing Program (Evanston, Illinois) as a way to build intergenerational wealth

**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 )**

. It is challenging to raise money, however if there is a group promoting something that is against our values, we would reject them. As of yet, we have not been approached by any of the above groups. We will obviously not take any strings-attached money. Our focus is on raising money from people who will be directly impacted by the Boston City Council. In addition to 100s of one-time donations, we currently have over 40 people contributing a small amount monthly to our campaign and this is where we would like to grow.

**(B) Racial Equity & Community Engagement**

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

1. Leadership in the creation of First Teacher, Vital Village Networks, DSNI School-Readiness Roundtable and other equity-based community organizations trusted by families in Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, and beyond

2. Worked with youth organizers engaging with "at-risk youth" (term used at the time) with newcomer communities, especially Asian and Latin American, in collaboration with multilingual and multicultural youth communities in East Boston to advance their leadership and build inroads with community policing; helped to create Green Shirts, a spin-off of Red Shirts, with the city to employ youth in developing, maintaining, and beautifying green spaces where they lived. (Funded by Mayor Menino's Main Streets Program and Pew Charitable Trust)

3. Currently working on ensuring families do not lose their P-EBT resources if they choose to attend in-person learning through BPS

**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?**

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1. Making sure our team has the linguistic capability to reach all our residents. We have spent the past 9 weekends dropping a letter in 4 languages from Josette to every single household in D4, not just the households with registered voters. We are spending our money/time doing exactly what we say we are doing.
2. Ensuring our team is accessible in a variety of spaces/platforms throughout the district, making it almost impossible for residents to NOT feel reactivated/reinvested: the first step in including residents in participatory decision making. We will have Constituent Cafes and office hours throughout D4; City Hall is coming to the people, rather than the other way around. We will continue securing input, ideas, and consensus with D4 residents, just like we have been on the campaign trail. Folks are engaged when they see, know the power of their vote. When we make city government transparent and connect it to people's everyday lives, engagement in local elections climbs.
3. Identifying all groups of constituents, making connections, and meeting them where they are at; asking them how THEY want to engage in our policymaking. We are as committed to including youth in the civic engagement process as we are to including adults. Our youth campaign slogan is "My future vote is coming for you."

### **(C) Charter Reform & Balance of Power**

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

I want to be a lead organizer for neighborhood solutions that don't necessarily require the Mayor's blessing or any legislative action. My assets-based approach lends itself to actively building the local models that could become new systems blueprints and structural solutions. I will also hold the mayor accountable, continuing to push to ensure ALL residents and districts can be engaged in the civic processes in Boston; bringing the voices/wishes of the people to a more amplified stage. I want to bridge our residents, neighborhoods, and City Hall.

#### **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. My campaign - and the way I lead my life, really - is about lifting up the assets in all people and places. I love that Ranked Choice Voting a. Gives the people more of an actual say in who leads us and b. Discourages nasty, ugly campaigning.

**4. Would you support changing the city charter to impose term limits for the office of Mayor in Boston? YES/ NO**

No. This was a tough one to answer; on one hand, the power of incumbency makes it difficult for new challengers to win elected positions. On the other hand, elections themselves act as term limits and requiring a public servant to step down due to term limits

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

I am excited about redistricting in 2022 and hope the districts make more sense to all residents of the city. Almost everyone I talk with is unaware of their own district and cannot understand why their neighbor across the street may be in an entirely different district. My hope with redistricting is that communities with the potential for great power - Black and Brown communities in Dorchester, for example, can be cohesive in terms of their district.

**(D) Revenue**

**1. Do you support the PILOT Action Group's [recommendations](#) for a standing PILOT commission with community representation? YES/ NO**

Yes. Anyone working on PILOT must insist that there be dedicated funds, with corresponding compliance, toward housing, food insecurity, education, etc.

**2. Given state law, Boston is limited in its taxing power. What opportunities do you see for the city to raise revenue?**

Again, insist that PILOT funds are not just a slush fund for the city, but have specific purposes.

**(E) Education**

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

1. Strategies to address families' basic economic needs, coupled with changing the weights in the assignment system to further prioritize families least likely to get their first choices or to get into highly-selected schools.

2. Racial bias training for all teachers, paired with a real understanding of the diaspora of where all our students come from combined with an authentic push to hire teachers that are representative of their students; this combined with a curriculum that is reflective of the excellence, contributions, history, and power of our students' backgrounds

3. Consistent and culturally-responsive outreach and relationship-building with ALL families in Boston. Families are very engaged in the pre-K and K years, and then the quality of the relationships and trust vary significantly across schools, neighborhoods, and between families of different backgrounds.

4. Affordable high-quality 0-5 system for ALL families

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

No. MANY families in D4 enroll their children in charters as an alternative to BPS, due to many factors. We need to respect those families' choices and allow existing charters to complete their seat allocation. As a city, we need to do more to collaborate with charters to support ALL students and ensure equity of access for ALL families, and most importantly, increase community trust in BPS throughout grades PK-12 so that more families choose BPS and stay within the district for their children's entire education. Families just want "good" schools for their kids and we need to understand their priorities and concerns more fully

**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. Community leaders, residents, and youth get to nominate committee members and the committee must be reflective of the BPS student and family body. This will ensure that the person with the most money raised is not necessarily the person on the 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. I am open to hearing what community leaders are already thinking, especially around the equitable use of zip codes. There does have to be a specific goal to ensure that communities that have been left behind (especially Black and Brown families) are prioritized AND all schools need advanced work (whether we call it that or not) so that these schools are a viable option for all students. Finally, any test that is identified as part of the process must reflect the curriculum that BPS students have had access to.

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

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I currently sit on the Advisory Council for UPK. I am also assisting in developing a Parent Governing Board and have pushed for that Board to have real power and be compensated for their work.

We likely have the number of seats we need, maxing out UPK is a matter of 1) making sure all seats meet the City's quality standard; 2) encouraging families to participate; and 3) probably adding at least \$50M to the system to fully invest in the quality elements.

## **(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. Overseeing the Boston Police Department's budget is a crucial aspect of serving as a city councilor. Given that the BPD has the largest budget, after the Boston Public Schools, it is important to understand the details of spending within the budget including enhancing military grade equipment and surveillance technologies.

- 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. Although many disagreed with District Attorney Rollin's actions to reduce the prosecution of low level offenses, I agree that it would reduce recidivism rates as well as have a positive effect on our communities. Research in its early stages is showing that these types of policies can directly impact communities in a positive way, according to the research, "Our results imply that a prosecutor's decision to not charge a defendant with a nonviolent misdemeanor significantly reduces their probability of future criminal legal contact." (WBUR)

- 3. Do you support ending information sharing between the Boston Police Department and ICE? YES/ NO**

Yes. Not only does the information shared with BPD to ICE harm many of our most vulnerable families in Boston, we have seen that this information sharing is detrimental to our immigrant students and families. It is important to the city to stop sharing Boston

- 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. Since the goal of the Boston Trust Act states that "local law enforcement shall not detain a person solely on the basis of a civil immigration detainer request issued by a federal immigration officer, or an administrative warrant issued by a federal immig

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

Yes. As I mentioned above both conscious and unconscious bias continued to plague our police force. This will only continue if racial equity and anti-racism training, community relationships and empowering our young people are not the highest priorities for the BPD. If young people are labeled or entered into a gang database we are marking them for them for life in ways that will continue to negatively affect them. Street worker, community policing (building relationships) and economic opportunities for young people are the best ways to support gang-involved youth.

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

Yes. As we have seen in the news, there has been an abuse of power across both the local and state police in Massachusetts in regard to overtime pay. Although overtime and ensuring the safety of our communities are a crucial aspect of police work, there should be limits to how much, how often and the duration of overtime. Although this may not be in the exact purview of the City Council, it is certainly something I would recommend is examined through the budget process. Overtime should account for no more than 10% of an officer's yearly salary; in addition, I would push to abolish the four-hour minimum overtime rule, as well as ensuring that all officers are offered the opportunity of overtime, not just a select few. The amount of money spent on police overtime is way too high in comparison to other city departments. According to the Massachusetts ACLU "at \$60.8 million, the BPD overtime budget makes up 15% of the entire BPD budget... and just 7.1% of the earnings of all City of Boston employees were categorized as overtime, yet 18.7% of the BPD earnings came from OT."

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

I would ensure that would be no option to go backwards in the negotiations about the vital existence of body cameras and dashboard cameras.

**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?**

1. Bail System

2. Responding to our mental health crisis through a harm reduction policy rather than a punitive one

3. Responding to the opioid crisis

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We need civilian boards of residents and professionals who can take a holistic approach to each of these issues and come up with solutions while we work with the Office of Police Accountability and Transparency as a vehicle to rebuild community trust in the Boston Police Department.

In addition, we need to expand street worker and youth violence groups lead by young people from the community, including those who have had system involvement.

Finally, and perhaps I should have started with this one, we must expand secondary opportunities for young people as a way to deter them from the streets.

**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. 15% to start, but over time I would like to see more city funds reallocated toward the interventions we discussed above based on the agencies who would have civilian workers and community members uplifting one another.

The 2020 budget reallocated about 20%, or \$12 million, of the Boston Police Department's overtime budget to invest in equity and inclusion after then Mayor Walsh declared racism a public health crisis. Below is how the money would be used. Expansions on these kinds of grassroots and community grown investments are what our communities need more of, right now.

\$3 million for the BPHC to begin implementing the eight strategies Mayor Walsh outlined in his declaration

\$1 million to support trauma teams and counseling services at the BPHC

\$2 million in new funding for community-based programs, such as violence intervention grants, youth programming, language and food access, Immigrant Advancement, the Age Strong Commission and the Human Rights Commission

\$2 million for additional public mental health services through a partnership between the Boston Police Department and Boston Medical Center Emergency Services Program or BEST

\$2 million to support economic development initiatives to support minority and women owned businesses

\$2 million to provide additional housing supports and youth homelessness programs



**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. I would add a ban on Military grade weapons and Military and national guard presences at protests.

**11. Do you believe that affiliation or sympathies with white supremacist organizations among officers is a problem with BPD? YES/ NO If so, what measures would you take as mayor to combat that issue?**

No. Although is definitely an area I would like to explore and understand more. I would need more context but what I can say is I do believe the blue line of secrecy is the problem we should focus on. The Boston Police Patrolmen's Union have made racist statements and publicly denounced Black Lives Matter, after the Boston Teachers Union celebrated Black Lives Matter at School week. I think this can attest to the views and opinions of many of the men and women in uniform, although not shared by all, this is the very type of systemic racism and power imbalances that affect outcomes for district 4 residents. I would like to see the outcomes of the newly appointed Executive Director of the Office of Police Accountability and Transparency provide updates to the City Council as well as the public as we continue to hold transparency at the core of public safety and community building. I hope that having this body within city government we will have better access to the data needed to provide the best safety to our communities.

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

Yes. Addiction affects people of all backgrounds. Everybody deserves a place to be safe. In addition, our emergency medical personnel are overwhelmed by overdose responses. We also must be incredibly deliberate about where these sites are placed. Too often, they are placed in communities that are already very impacted by drugs, substance abuse, and trauma.

We must push to re-open the Long Island facility with state support to share the burden across cities. Unfortunately, Boston is holding the brunt of the entire Commonwealth's substance-use issue. In an effort to support our vulnerable population of those in need of substance abuse services, we must have a cross-municipal effort to build a coalition of cities and towns supporting safe injections sites. This in hopes to disperse the supports across the state so that our neighbors in Roxbury, the South End and Dorchester are able to feel safe in their own communities.

**(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, but we need to create access for people to get around other ways. Currently the MBTA is not accessible for everyone. Let's create more carpooling options and other ways to minimize the number of cars on the road. Also, bikes are important but families need to feel that their neighborhoods are safe to bike in. If you are thinking about bike lanes, you need to think about how this will impact people trying to get across town.

**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?**

1. Protect, maintain, and develop more safe outside green spaces.
2. Include climate change in our BPS curriculum starting in pre-K and include Madison Park and other high schools in designing green technology
3. Planning to protect people against extreme heat; food access is also a big part of resiliency as extreme weather deeply impact both production and supply.

**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. Following the mayor's initiative to ensure low-income communities have free access - this is already happening! Let's keep it going. In addition, we must recognize that not all neighborhoods have access to the MBTA, and fight to create new frequent, reliable bus routes in these neighborhoods. We should consider increasing the Fairmount line.

**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?**

1. Meeting families where they are at - affordable housing must be affordable for the income brackets in our community
2. Work with Madison Park High School to create tiny home communities
3. Ensure that all new housing built has at least 35% actual low-income housing versus affordable housing, which is often not affordable for many D4 residents

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

We need to learn from community organizations that have been doing this work for decades; partnering with DSNi and NOAH (East Boston) to learn about the use of land trust, eminent domain, and abandoned homes is a good place to start. We should offer homes through lottery. We must also recognize that one of the issues with city-owned land is that it is spread throughout the city, rather than large parcels. There may need to be an investment program through which the city tries to acquire more private property adjacent to city-owned land, but this must be done in a way that doesn't displace people, rather it builds their wealth.

**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 strongly support a transfer tax increase with proceeds going to the Housing Trust. Given the value of real estate in Boston, I believe sales above \$1,000,000 should be taxed at 1% and those over \$2,000,000 be taxed at 2%.

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

Yes. I would revisit the policy we had in Massachusetts until 1994 and work with community organizations that have been leading the charge like City Life/Vida Urbana. This is an area I need to learn more about.

**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. 35%.

**8. Do you support requiring that a majority of new affordable units be built on-site, in order to ensure communities are diverse and integrated? YES/ NO**

Yes.

**9. Do you support breaking up the BPDA and creating an independent public office of planning? YES/ NO If so, how will you make it happen?**

Yes. I would favor dismantling the BPDA if it can be accomplished without extraordinary use of resources, time, money and political capital that could otherwise be devoted to addressing the underlying concerns and failings of the BPDA. Dismantling is a major logistical and political challenge. We definitely need a city wide master plan, and updated comprehensive zoning code from those adopted in the 1960s, which could be accomplished by separating development from planning and allowing broader representation in the planning process. Functions that duplicate functions performed by City agencies can be transferred out of BPDA. An open public budget approval process needs to be implemented as well. Again, we would be better served to bring the BPDA more under the umbrella of the City but if there are easier ways to accomplish our goals I would pursue those avenues.

**10. Do you support increasing the number of units that are ADA compliant in projects that receive City funds? YES/ NO**

Yes. True equity would indicate that ALL new housing be ADA-compliant, otherwise we're preventing people with disabilities from having equal access to the marketplace.

**(I) Economic Opportunity**

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

1. Increase minimum wage

2. Advocate for a basic income experiment similar to Cambridge while working with Family Independence Initiative (now Up Together) to learn from their philanthropy-funded model of a type of basic income

3, Ensure there is high-quality free and reduced childcare in families' own neighborhoods so that parents can work

4. Workforce development - free 21st century training to ensure 21st century salaries

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- 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**

No. I am very mixed on this one. I would defer to people in the industries - will these wages compensate for the amount of tips they would receive?

- 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 would take these steps:

1. work with and provide incentives to the unions to train more eligible workers
2. create a clear data base of eligible workers from each category so that a contractor's excuse that there were not enough available workers could be disproven easily
3. work to change the public bidding laws to include compliance as a non-negotiable.

- 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?**

15% by 2023; 25% by 2025.

I will work with the mayor to continue allocating money to support Black-owned businesses; create opportunities for these businesses to access contracts; ensure there are no barriers in place to keep Black-owned businesses from receiving these contracts.

In addition, there need to be public resources invested in business growth. The overwhelming proportion of businesses of color in Boston are micro-business (under \$500K in revenue and fewer than 10 employees). Too many businesses will fail to qualify for contracts even if they are broken up..the government has to find creative ways to provide more growth capital.

- 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. Again, we need more investments in business growth. I would talk with community organizations like Ujima Boston to learn from how they are investing in their small businesses.

- 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?**

Ensure these communities get first dibs on licenses

- 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. To ensure that our youth become active voters, I will encourage pre-registration drives in Boston's high schools to ensure that students are automatically registered on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. I am also excited to work with Councilor Mejia on her proposal to lower the voting age to 16 for city elections as well. These two steps are critical to ensuring that our young people become engaged voters on the issues closest to them, including education, public safety, employment, and climate change, while they are still in their family homes and communities and solidify their voting patterns early on.

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

One that doesn't break up neighborhoods down side streets but look at main streets that run through multiple neighborhoods! Ensuring each district has a thriving main street scene. Make lines not around structures (cemeteries) but around number of people.

**4. Would you support the redrawing of Boston's wards and precincts ("reprecincting"), which has not happened in more than 100 years -- and which happens decennially in other MA cities and towns? YES/ NO**

Yes. I have learned the the number of people in each precinct in D4 varies widely. This impacts wait-time at polling stations which is clearly an equity issue. What if I am not able to take an hour off from work to vote?!

**(K) Additional Comments**

As a city employee, I would love to be able to ask for money for my campaign. This archaic law that I am not able to get the resources I need to run for office is a real barrier.

As a Black woman, I am uncomfortable with the fact that my address is shared publicly.

Finally, you do not ask about non-voters. I would love to talk further with you about your plans/ideas to increase the vote in Boston, especially in districts like mine!

Finally finally, for real - how can we create local annexes in each district for people who cannot get down to City Hall - travel, cost, parking tickets, etc!