

# 2023 Salem City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Progressive Salem

Name: Caroline Watson-Felt

Office Sought: Ward 2 Councillor, for reelection.

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## **PUBLIC SECTION**

*The public part of the questionnaire contains a mix of yes/no and open-ended questions. Please keep all answers to open-ended questions to no more than 150 words. A non-response to a yes/no question will be treated as a no.*

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

1. What would be your top three priorities if elected to serve?
  - Pedestrian safety and traffic calming.
  - Affordable housing – especially for seniors and single-guardian families.
  - Resiliency of our built environment.
2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

Anyone who runs and is elected by majority vote is able to serve. The concept of qualification to hold office is relatively subjective and not defined by City charter. I believe that there are qualities and skills that I bring from my years as a volunteer, nonprofit leader, and change and communications manager, as well as my experience as a sitting City Councillor that have been constructive as a representative of Ward 2 residents in council chambers, as well as with residents when hearing their concerns and discussing potential solutions and ideas for the betterment of Salem. Those skills include clear and transparent communication, diplomacy and listening, and an approach that is centered on what is fair and just.
3. What do you see as the role of the City Council in Salem?

By City Charter, the City Council acts as the legislative body in Salem, representing the needs of Salem residents. Each Councillor either represents a

specific group of constituents (organized and represented by Wards) or as a city-wide representative. The council can hear and raise and discuss the concerns of Salem's residents as well as opportunities and new ideas for the betterment of Salem. We can work both in collaboration with the Mayor and their department heads as well as act as a balance point to the Administration to ensure initiatives and goals consistently take into account the unique concerns, needs, and interests of all of Salem's residents.

4. What is the one policy you've seen pioneered in another city that you'd most like to see Salem adopt?
5. What does community service mean to you?

People participate in and serve our community in various ways every day; in ways large and small, to their interests and abilities, in ways that fit into their lives. For my part, I'm less concerned about the definition of community service, than I am that there be accessible and ample opportunities for public engagement; for members of our community to participate in making Salem better for all. In my opinion, a functioning and progressive community should represent the broadly diverse interests and skills of that community in a knit tapestry of engagement.

## **(B) Civil Rights & Community Engagement**

1. Name an accomplishment you're particularly proud of that helped to achieve and advance racial justice or equity.
2. What steps would you take, if elected, to engage all the diverse communities of Salem in policymaking, and what past actions of yours should give voters confidence that you will follow through?

In my capacity as Ward 2 Councillor, my specific focus is to ensure I'm gathering the input and engagement of residents of Ward 2. Many of whom reflect various diverse communities in Salem.

3. The future of democracy depends on robust youth engagement. Describe how you engage youth formally in your work as city councilor, or would plan to do so if elected.

I have been proud to participate in civic engagement days at Salem Academy in my capacity as a Councillor, and have spent time explaining Salem's City government structure and look forward to continuing that engagement. In

addition, I take every opportunity that I'm able to to represent the City Council at Public School events, engaging with students there as well.

4. What do you think it means to be an ally of the LGBTQ+ community?

As a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, I think it's important to remind and reinforce readers on two key points: 1. Allies are named allies by the community they are attempting to advocate for and hold up. No one should self-describe as an ally but rather one who always strives to be an ally to the community. 2. At its core, allyship is primarily exhibited by using privilege to give space and access to marginalized communities who do not have the same access or attention as someone seeking to be an ally. If space and access aren't being made available by an advocate, then they're not acting as a true ally.

In my own work, I have been a consistent advocate for the LGBTQIA+ community both before and since becoming elected.

5. If a resolution had come before the council to support access to driver's licenses and extending in-state tuition rates & aid to undocumented residents how would you have voted and why?

Yes. The ability to ensure undocumented residents have access to learning and to demonstrate driving skills and acquire insurance, keeps everyone safer, further enables access to pathways to citizenship without fear of reactionary legal action, and further supports that undocumented residents are our neighbors, deeply ingrained in our community.

### **(C) Budget & Revenue**

1. What opportunities do you see for the city to raise revenue?

### **(D) Education**

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

I believe this is the unique focus of the elected School Committee Members. I have enjoyed a strong collaborative working relationship with the School Committee and have supported their work. As an elected official to Council we

can act as supporters and collaborators on these matters but we must respect the jurisdiction of the School Committee as they work toward their goals.

2. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools in Salem? **YES/ NO**  YES
3. What steps would you take to raise the school rating for the Salem Public School System as a whole?

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### **(E) Public Safety**

1. Would you advocate for the reallocation of money from the Salem Police Department budget to be reinvested in communities? **YES/ NO**  The answer to this question is not as simple as a Yes or No in Salem, specifically due to the existence of the Community Impact Unit which I wholeheartedly support and have advocated for the expansion of funding for that department. Moreover, I would not support the de- or re-funding of the Traffic and Parking Unit or others of the services unit which includes ongoing domestic violence response and engagement. Additionally, recent funding has been dedicated to expanding and upgrading the body camera program which supports my personal belief that police departments need to have a greater sense of accountability. From a national-conversation perspective, yes – I support the de- or re-funding of police departments. In Salem, I feel a lot of very positive work has been done to address the issues of policing in America here in Salem.

#### **a. If Yes, how would you “refund” the police and reallocate resources?**

2. Do you support the legalization of overdose prevention centers? **YES/ NO** -  YES, however, I would look to the valuable input of the Community Impact Unit as well as local health practitioners. I heartily support both the increased access to Narcan as well as the increased access to fentanyl test strips which I believe should be made broadly available.
3. What steps would you take to address homelessness in Salem?

I have consistently supported policies that expand access to “affordable”, and “Affordable” housing. Moreover, I have supported expanding the budget for the Community Impact Unit so that additional mental health clinicians could be added to the team.

4. What steps can the city take to address pedestrian safety?

There are so many potential options to address pedestrian safety – from restricting right-on-red turns in some heavily pedestrian-trafficked areas, to increasing the number of raised crossings throughout the downtown, to increasing the number of lights that have full-stop crossings with audio indicators. It’s important also to expand traffic calming in heavily pedestrian areas as well – if we can slow down speeds, that will also help to further protect pedestrians.

5. (Did you) Would you have voted in favor of the sanctuary for peace ordinance?  
YES/NO  YES

## **(F) Environment & Transportation**

1. What steps would you take to reduce dependence on cars and better facilitate the ability of Salemites to get around by walking, biking, or using public transit?

I have supported the extension of protected bike lanes and multi-use paths in Salem, and believe much work needs to be done at the State level to continue increasing access to public transit. I have supported the Salem Skipper program, the expansion of the Blue Bikes program and have consistently advocated for an inter-city shuttle service.

2. What are your plans long term to address the city's aging water pipe infrastructure?

The City Council does not have administrative oversight of Salem’s water and sewer infrastructure. In our capacity, I have advocated for ongoing work on our aging infrastructure and supported financial appropriations and capital budget used to addressing these issues. Moreover, I have requested of the Administration that long-term planning be done to address these issues in the specific context of rising sea levels and water inundation/mitigation needs.

3. What are your top three policy priorities for making Salem a climate-resilient city, and how would you ensure that equity is at the center of any such efforts?
  - a. I believe we need to pursue capital projects to protect our built environment through the reinforcement of our beaches from erosion, maintaining and raising new sea walls and berms, and ensure any of

our major city amenities are raised or moved to be protected from water inundation.

- b. Furthering means of solar energy generation on public buildings and lands,
  - c. increasing the number of electric cars in the City's fleet, increasing access to electric car charging across the city to support residents' EV car charging needs
4. Do you oppose the creation of new fossil fuel infrastructure in Salem? **YES/ NO**  
 YES, I oppose it.
  5. Do you support the fare-free trolley program? **YES/ NO**  The Salem Trolley is a privately held organization offering a free rider program to Salem residents, with limitations, and is not a municipal transit program. Our "support" is personal and not by vote, financing, or with oversight.
  6. Do you support the expansion of the City's curbside composting pickup program? **YES/ NO**  Yes
  7. Do you support the offshore wind project? **YES/NO**  Yes
  8. Do you support continuing the existing Blue Bikes program? **Maintain / Expand / Eliminate**  **Expand**
  9. Do you support the City's partnership with Boston Harbor Cruises offering ferry service to and from Boston? **YES / NO**  YES
  10. Do you support Salem adopting Vision Zero, which guides our transportation policy towards eliminating all traffic fatalities and making our roads safer for all users? **YES / NO**  YES

## **(G) Housing**

1. Do you agree or disagree that Salem should do more to encourage housing production of all types, including both market rate and income-restricted? If so, how can the City encourage housing production?

I agree that the City needs to do more to encourage the production of income-restricted and affordable units. The City has added a number of market rate housing in the last number of years, with multiple more projects in process, but I see the majority need reflected in our current residents and those who work in Salem is for more affordable units. I do not believe we have seen sufficient proof in the greater Boston area that increased number of

market rate units in a single town can affect the real estate market sufficiently to reduce the cost of housing.

2. What opportunities do you see for leveraging city-owned land for expanding market rate and Affordable housing?

As a part of the City Council, we recently passed regulation that prioritizes affordable housing as a preferred use of any public land deemed to be surplus. I was a vocal supporter of that in both my role as a member of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board and a member of the Council.

3. Do you support rent stabilization? **YES/ NO** if yes how would you help stabilize it? Yes, I would support rent stabilization programs that help to protect residents from repeated large rent increases year over year at a rate that is outpacing the increasing wages.
4. How do you plan to address the intersection of homelessness and soaring housing prices?

As stated above, there is a need to increase the number of steeply affordable units in Salem to assist in both a diversified housing stock available in the market as well as to enable more residents currently experiencing housing insecurity to obtain stable permanent housing.

5. Do 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, and this is a part of the current draft "Condo Conversion" ordinance which I have actively worked on.
6. Do you support implementing an inclusionary development policy (IDP) in Salem at 10% as has been discussed to date? **Yes at 10% / Higher % / Lower % / Not at all**  Higher%
7. Do you Support the ending of mandatory minimum parking requirements for new construction? **YES/NO**  This is not a Yes or No answer for me. With the current state of public transit in Salem and the surrounding area, there is still too much necessity for people to have cars to get to work and grocery stores and other amenities. While I support endeavors that make Salem a less-car centered city, I also acknowledge that Salem is not yet a city that can support a fully car-free lifestyle for those who live here. Moreover, many of the people who work in Salem cannot afford to live here and are dependent on cars in many cases to get to work. The concept of completely ending minimum

parking requirements for new construction must also take into account the access to public transportation, public schools, medical facilities, and grocery stores. Lastly, the number one issue that is raised to me by Ward 2 residents are parking related – much of the time by residents who have moved into units developed with variances that did not require minimum parking. Those people all have cars, because they still need them.

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. Across the city, there are projects for large-scale supportive housing that are being fought by local communities, such as Lee Fort Terrace, Lifebridge, etc. Do you support pushing forward with these specific projects and others like them? **YES/ NO**  There is nothing formally in front of City Council regarding the potential LifeBridge project yet to “push forward.” I have worked closely with both the concerned neighbors as well as LifeBridge and the developer to work toward some solution to expand services for our unhoused neighbors however this project is still in draft phase and there has been nothing presented to Council to vote on at this time. Regarding the Lee Fort Terrace project, I supported the necessary decisions related to further that project.

## **(H) Economic Opportunity**

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

I’m not exactly sure how to answer this question within the purview of my position as a City Councillor. I believe increasing access to affordable housing is paramount to further economically diversifying our community. I also look forward to supporting a forthcoming Wage Theft ordinance which is currently being worked on. Wage Theft adversely affects minority groups and this protection will help to ensure fair pay.

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. What steps can the Council take to achieve greater diversity in City contracting?

I support the work of the DEI Director and the City Administration’s DEI goals, and understand the work of that department is involved in these processes. I



applaud this work.

4. The cannabis industry is expected to grow in Salem 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?

## **(I) Democracy**

1. How can Salem increase turnout in municipal elections?

City administration has done a lot of important good work over the last number of years to lower the barrier to engagement to voting by making early in-person voting and vote by mail options available in Salem. I support these efforts and have publicized them. I would like to see potentially leveraging shuttle programs such as the Council on Aging and Skipper to assist in transporting residents to their voter locations as well.

2. How can the council increase transparency?

I would like to see more specifics listed in City agendas which I have previously advocated for. I am proud that we voted to ensure that Council meetings remain accessible for attending either in person or virtually, and that our meetings remain live streamed and recordings posted on the City Council's webpage.

3. What are you personally doing to increase turnout in this upcoming election?

As in previous years, I will continue to share out important milestone dates in this year's election cycle including how to confirm if you are registered to vote, where you're registered to vote and/or the last days to get registered to vote in Salem, as well as election days and polling locations.

4. Do you support allowing non-citizens with legal status the right to vote in municipal elections? **YES/ NO**  Yes
5. Do you support allowing 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in municipal elections? **YES/ NO**  YES
6. Would you support Charter Change to allow for Ranked Choice Voting in Salem? **YES/ NO**  YES though I have not yet gathered the broad input of Ward 2 voters whom I represent.

7. Do you support making hybrid access to public meetings permanent? **YES/**  
**NO**  YES

**(J) Additional Comments**

*(Use this space to make any final comments you deem important for progressive voters assessing your candidacy.)*