

2023 Salem City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Progressive Salem

Name: Jeff Cohen

Office Sought: Ward 5 City Councillor

Website: <https://jeffcohenforsalem.weebly.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffCohensDirectActionNetwork>

Twitter: For reasons Jack Dorsey & Elon Musk and their support of white supremacy, I have ALWAYS refused to use Twitter

Instagram: @jeffcohenforward5

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? **Constituent services, changing the paradigm about affordable housing, making Salem a sustainable & resilient community**
2. What qualifies you to hold this office? **As running for re-election, hope my constituents believe I've served them well. I do not believe, as some candidates do, that running for office is a qualification. Prior to being a Councillor, I was the only person who was a chair of two City boards (then No Place for Hate and Sustainability, Energy & Resiliency Committee). I also wrote the original draft of the sanctuary ordinance and a green building ordinance on behalf of those committees. I serve on the Board of Project Out. I was Salem's 1st recycling coordinator (2013-2015) and was Solar Coach for the 1st Solarize Salem program (2014).**
3. What do you see as the role of the City Council in Salem? **Ward Councillors should handle constituent services by connecting the appropriate City staff and listening/following up. We are the City's legislature and need to take seriously our role in determining policy (ordinances).**

4. What is the one policy you've seen pioneered in another city that you'd most like to see Salem adopt? Since 2018, Lynn has had a wage theft ordinance that is excellent and I brought it to several Councillors, but it never made it even to a subcommittee hearing. I'll be submitting one along with Councillor McClain to Council in September.
5. What does community service mean to you? My mom was a social justice warrior and talk me that helping those who need it most what life is about. I didn't run and haven't acted before to represent all equally as some don't need it and many need it a lot. My intent is for all to consider me a friend that they can depend on.

(B) Civil Rights & Community Engagement

1. Name an accomplishment you're particularly proud of that helped to achieve and advance racial justice or equity. Writing the sanctuary city original draft. Jose Antonio Vargas spoke in Salem and said that we need to be comfortable talking about things not comfortable and we needed and still need to have dialogue in our community about who belongs. At a meeting recently, the head of an organization said Dominicans aren't Americans. I don't care if you've lived here your entire life or 5 minutes, vote or don't...you belong here.
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? Being present is a minimum and I don't represent communities I don't belong to, but willing to advocate for them and have done so. I've been a marshall at Black Lives Matter rallies, am on the Board of Project Out, wrote the sanctuary ordinance 1st draft, helped push through Indigenous People's Day and helped organize the testimony and testified as a hate crime victim when Salem passed the enhanced non-discrimination ordinance.
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. When people are elected as Councillors, we're invited to do lots of things, including reading to students or teaching a class. I did both prior. Since a Councillor, I have done this each time have the opportunity and brought the 8th graders (and teacher) at Saltonstall to Council to testify about a petition they wrote and got 100 signatures for about bike safety. Twice a month, I teach a class at YouthBuild and bring in mystery guests (Mayor, City's Health & Wellness & DEI Director, Miguel & Manny Cruz, DPS Director, Crowley)

and am working with the students so they can ace interviews and hopefully get placed in good jobs.

4. What do you think it means to be an ally of the LGBTQ+ community? Being an ally isn't good enough, so I hope the LGBTQA communities and others consider me an accomplice. It's not what we say, but what we do. I'm on the Board of Project Out and won The Rainbow Times 1st All Star award (2018). Again, it's about standing with them.
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? I spoke up and expressed my views to Senator Lovely & Rep Tucker about licenses and fully support them. I also support in state tuition/aid for undocumented. Licenses are a public safety benefit and I believe undocumented people should immediately receive amnesty. However, I've written many resolutions before and during being a Councillor (carbon, Benson, green new deal, Green Futures Act, etc.) and resolutions are statements, but not necessarily as impactful, sometimes checking a box. I will support resolutions such as these if there is a path to getting them to the appropriate legislators.

(C) Budget & Revenue

1. What opportunities do you see for the city to raise revenue? Our commercial tax base is only 6% and this must change. I'm not happy with the process with Prime at Shetland as don't believe the City has been assertive enough in continuing and expanding the commercial component there. We are not forward thinking enough. For example, we assume we need to hire a hauler for trash and recycling and should be investing in composting, styrofoam compressor and other things that will enable us to create revenue and jobs and benefit our environment. We should someday be our own hauler as were before. I believe we need to start thinking of purchasing electric and gas from National Grid (communities that own their own electric – M'head, Peabody, Danvers, Ipswich, Rowley, Groveland, etc. – the ratepayers pay about 40% less per kwh and they control everything and make money). The school solar arrays on Bentley & Witchcraft were my concept and not only do we offset hundreds of thousands of dollars of electricity annually, we are receiving ~\$1M in revenue for the schools.

(D) Education

1. What are your top priorities for reducing persistent racial and economic achievement gaps in the Salem Public Schools? **This is a strange question as the School Committee has jurisdiction over the schools. I not only believe our schools are doing well in these regards, probably better than Council, so will leave up to them.**
2. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools in Salem? **YES/ NO** **It's my understanding that Salem cannot expand as reached our limit on charters. That said, I'm NOT for expansion.**
3. What steps would you take to raise the school rating for the Salem Public School System as a whole? **Again, an inappropriate question for Council. If a Council candidate thinks they can do better than School Committee candidates, they should run for that position.**

(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** **No, will expound as believe SPD does many things appropriate and unique. I do believe we can invest in other services separate from the department.**
 - 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**
3. What steps would you take to address homelessness in Salem? **Sorry, but I'm somewhat resistant to the framing of the question. My view is that we all need to see the unhoused as people/residents and for who they are. I'm supportive of the work of Lifebridge and believe that providing services, shelter, food is imperative. I also believe that Harborlight & Seeds of Hope are really good models for helping people live in a safe permanent space that can enable them to succeed. Most important, we need to increase our rental stock and affordability.**
4. What steps can the city take to address pedestrian safety? **It starts with pedestrian safety and I agree with the complete streets concept. I appreciate most of the traffic calming and support expansion – protected bike lanes create narrower roads that are also safer for pedestrians. More speed humps. Less addiction to brick sidewalks and increased resources to get through the backlog of fixing our sidewalks so all can use safety.**
- 5.

6. (Did you) Would you have voted in favor of the sanctuary for peace ordinance?
YES/NO I wrote the original, but was an actual sanctuary ordinance. Sanctuary for Peace OK, but didn't go far enough.

(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 believe we need to have a shuttle (free for residents, a cost to others to make sustainable). More protected bike lanes. Sidewalks ALL can use safely.
2. What are your plans long term to address the city's aging water pipe infrastructure? This was addressed in Council this year as we are gradually raising the rates to accommodate the need to infrastructure improvements. I did propose putting turbines in new pipes, but didn't get a positive response from the previous City Engineer. Perhaps the new one will be more proactive.
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? We are an Environmental Justice community and I believe that should be the priority as those who live in vulnerable areas are more likely to be from marginalized communities and can't afford the impact of the climate crisis. I just don't think our City leaders (Council, Mayor) have taken this as seriously as must. We rightfully are dealing with resiliency, which is important, but sustainability – the means to mitigate the crisis is not as much a priority as should. We must at Council pass the Specialized Code, create more EV charging & bicycle parking/path capacity and educate those who own multi-unit (apartments, condos) to convert to electric.
4. Do you oppose the creation of new fossil fuel infrastructure in Salem? **YES/ NO** I wrote the home rule petition and will write the ordinance if Salem is allowed to write one.
5. Do you support the fare-free trolley program? **YES/ NO** I support that, but we need a citywide shuttle – free for residents.
6. Do you support the expansion of the City's curbside composting pickup program? **YES/ NO** I support the efforts the schools are undertaking and Councillor Varela's ordinance to mandate composting for businesses and municipal properties. "Expansion of" is somewhat comical to me as I helped

do the outreach for the “free” bin and pickup (grant) and we couldn’t get to 1500 homes. We need to do our own composting to create revenue and jobs that will also pay for education and outreach to enable such a thing. Those who compost are typically more affluent so need to factor equity into this discussion.

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 disagree with some in Salem that we need to encourage market rate housing as do not believe there is a correlation. Sheila Dillon, Boston’s Housing Director for many years, has reinforced. The exception is that inclusionary zoning, done right, will include market rate housing.**
2. What opportunities do you see for leveraging city-owned land for expanding market rate and Affordable housing? **I only see opportunities for affordable housing, not market rate on City-owned land. Perhaps at some point, we will have less school aged students and can use a school for affordable housing. As City owned, don’t see rationale to have market rate.**
3. Do you support rent stabilization? **YES/ NO** if yes how would you help stabilize it? **Yes. I do believe that thoughtful rent control is a way to stabilize rents. Mayor Wu’s proposal for Boston is positive, but should be revised to include less than 6 units. The best way to stabilize rents is to increase rental stock, which we’re failing at. The legislature’s unwillingness to grant our home rule petition so can write a condo conversion regulation ordinance is discouraging as we should, as Somerville did, have autonomy to decide for ourselves. This would be the most significant tool. We also need to better enforce the short**

term rental ordinance violations, which also result from tenants losing their spaces.

4. How do you plan to address the intersection of homelessness and soaring housing prices? **Detailed above.**
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 I support tenants having right of 1st refusal and City 2nd right as spelled out in the draft the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board (AHTFB) has as draft. The reference to “a building” is not relative to Salem and most tenants live in a unit in a building and so 1st refusal would be for their unit.**
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 Yes at about 15%. Boston increased theirs from 10% to 13% and Mayor Wu has proposed to 17%. Minneapolis has properties at 30% at 30% AMI.**
7. Do you Support the ending of mandatory minimum parking requirements for new construction? **YES/NO I support parking variances included in the inclusionary zoning ordinance. Am surprised no mention of density bonuses as my belief is that a combination of percentage/cost (i.e. 15% at 60% AMI or tiered to 50%), density bonus and parking = best way to increase affordability to where needed.**
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 Not sure what “local communities” means. No project has faced opposition from an entire neighborhood and sometimes a small minority can be loudest. LeeFort Terrace & Lifebridge are vastly different as the former a private public partnership that is expanding the amount of property based vouchers in a safer more sustainable/resilient property and the later expanding services and long term housing for previously unhoused. I supported LeeFort Terrace and will evaluate Lifebridge/Harborlight as evolves, but do appreciate their missions. Am not sure why Canal St Station (Bertini’s) not included in this question as,**

unlike the others, 100% private (more difficult to fund affordability & sustainability because less grants available) and is 250 rental units (workforce housing) with 20% at 60% AMI and very sustainable (solar PV, EV charging, all electric) and resilient (setback from wetlands it owns and rebuilding some and flood mitigation).

(H) Economic Opportunity

1. What steps would you propose to reduce Salem's income and wealth inequality, especially the racial wealth gap? **Unless we adequately address our housing crisis, the income inequality will get worse. Without public transit that's free or affordable, we can't create enough economic drivers. We need to increase our commercial business ratio as well.**
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 – What of City hired contractors that are on the job for hours, days on City contracted work? Need more context.**
3. What steps can the Council take to achieve greater diversity in City contracting? **As with above question, this requires more context. I envision requirements for contracts that are of a certain length. Could be x% local, x%union, x% POC, x% women.**
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 don't believe the CCC regulations about how a community can negotiate CBA make sense. We can assess a 3% fee, the state gets 17% and yet the community endures the impact. I have submitted testimony to the CCC that believe we should have autonomy over such agreements as we do with others. We have reached out limit re cannabis retail. If "communities most impacted by the drug war" refers to POC, I'm OK with CCC mandating inclusion at the business level.**

(I) Democracy

1. How can Salem increase turnout in municipal elections? **I don't have much confidence in adults as evidenced by the low turnouts and lack of candidates.**

I believe we much do more outreach to youth and include them in the process (question 5).

2. How can the council increase transparency? We're transparent, our legislature not (perhaps worst in US). Our meetings all hybrid and recorded and people know how we vote immediately.
3. What are you personally doing to increase turnout in this upcoming election? As detailed above, I spend time working with our youth and encouraging and empowering them. We could also have varied meeting times as too many in our community can't attend when we meet. We should also go where people are and hang out.
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, but believe we're addressing only part of the issue here in Salem. Our City Clerk elections division reports to the City Clerk, who reports to elected officials (Council). I believe we should be exploring an elections commission as Cambridge and Revere have. Also, I believe 2 year term for Councillors should be 4 years. Too many factor in voting considerations and believe might be more principled if weren't always running. I personally don't vote to get votes.**
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.)