

2023 Salem City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Progressive Salem

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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?

Serving the people of my ward. Being their voice. Protecting their interests.

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

I'm an independent, creative thinker without political ties. As a filmmaker, community builder and creator of neighborhood groups and cultural events like Salem Film Fest I've spent my life speaking truth to power, capturing and presenting the stories of the unheard. I will bring the voices of my Ward to the City Council.

All the best things in my life have happened because of community and collaboration. As a filmmaker, I approach people with an open mind, listen, capture their stories, and then amplify them through my films. Politicians will tell you they are listening. Listening is not enough. Acting upon what is heard determines the value of a listener.

Managing film productions, I have experience working with teams of different personalities towards a common goal. Creating a neighborhood organization helped give weight to the issues facing my neighbors. Sitting on The Salem Italian American Credit Union board strengthened my financial knowledge. Designing, running, and programming Salem Film Fest involved managing dozens of organizers and hundreds of volunteers while creating a receptive atmosphere for international filmmakers. I don't look to follow patterns or replicate what others

have done. I adapt ideas to specific places and situations and create new ways of doing old things.

In my business and personal life, I've been a fiscally responsible hard worker, who likes inventing opportunities to make things better. I will be doing that as a representative of the people of Ward 3 and we will have fun in the process.

3. What do you see as the role of the City Council in Salem?

Being the voice of the people in my Ward.

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

I'd like to see Salem approach its Witch Trials history with the same solemn respect that Danvers does, rather than the playful/fantastic Orlando and Anaheim approach. People were murdered here and we have turned that horrible story into a cash cow that characterizes the victims as an ugly stereotype of exactly the thing they went to their deaths proclaiming not to be. Some people consider this a Progressive city, but here we are victim-shaming for the sake of gold coins.

5. What does community service mean to you?

Organizing, creating and volunteering on events and initiatives that educate, entertain, help or give voice to the community.

(B) Civil Rights & Community Engagement

1. Name an accomplishment you're particularly proud of that helped to achieve and advance racial justice or equity.

I have not been in a political office before, but as a filmmaker I have spent decades working with and for people of diverse backgrounds and amplifying their stories. I have worked with black owned production companies and edited shows for TV stations like Aspire and TV One that have been part of building a network for people of color. My many collaborations with former Black Panther leader Jamal Joseph helped promote Jamal's Impact Repertory Theater in Harlem

The Salem of my youth and even the Salem I returned to in 2007 were not very racially diverse. But I have always had a diverse group of friends and collaborators. As a co-founder, former Program Director and former Fest Director of Salem Film Fest I helped bring stories by and about people of all colors, sexual preferences and world cultures to the North Shore. The Fest has diversified its leadership over the years as more people have become excited about our offerings and been motivated to join in our

efforts. We have tried to create a welcoming and open atmosphere for everyone and we have benefited by the guiding input that diversity imparts.

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?

I will serve everyone in my ward equally, will act when called upon and will make myself available and accessible. My work in helping create and lead the Greater Endicott Street Neighborhood Association (GESNA), and its subcommittee Our Neighborhood, Our History (ONOH) has given our neighborhood a greater presence and voice in City matters. I created and am president of the Salem Community Art Center non-profit which helped save St Mary Italian Church from being gutted for housing - I contributed many hundreds of volunteer hours over several years in that effort. That non-profit also runs Salem Film Fest - which required at least a few hundred volunteer hours a year over the 14 years in which I was designing the Fest, the Program Director or the Director. Once I lock my teeth onto something I'm a pit bull - you can't get me off. In word, in print and in action, you can expect me to take the same approach as a Ward Councilor.

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 remember a Salem that had more active programs in its various playgrounds - with instructors leading activities and parades each year to participate in. I'd like to see if we can't resurrect some form of that - as a means to get more of our youth outside, off their devices and in cooperative activities with others. I would like to form a Ward 3 Youth Council, made up of youngsters under 18, who could be my direct advisors on issues that concern them and on new ideas.

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

To offer pro-active support. To act when called upon. To help create a City and an atmosphere where they are treated like everyone else and can live beyond labels.

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?

These would never come before the City Council - these are state issues. A city cannot make a separate decision on driver's licenses or tuition rates.

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(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?

Not something I can affect as a City Councillor. This is a Mayoral or School Committee question

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

This is not a yes or no answer. It is contingent on many factors.

3. What steps would you take to raise the school rating for the Salem Public School System as a whole?

This is a Mayoral or School Committee question.

(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**

a. If Yes, how would you "refund" the police and reallocate resources? I currently have no access to the police department budget so it would be improper and uninformed for me to comment on this. I do know through my dealings with the CIU that they are hard pressed to keep up with the situation on the streets and could use more resources to put towards the sort of counseling and mental health issues they deal with daily. Not all police departments should be judged in the same light. Clearly there are cities with repeated internal issues that need to be addressed with reallocation of personnel and funds. I'm not sure that is the case here but I will be meeting with Police Chief Miller and riding with the CIU to become

better informed. I am also open to meeting with anyone who has had issues with local enforcement to understand their concerns.

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2. Do you support the legalization of overdose prevention centers? **YES/ NO**
Answering broad stroke questions that have great impact on the community with a Yes or No is unproductive.

3. What steps would you take to address homelessness in Salem? This is a multi-layered issue I want to dig into and help lead on when elected. We are facing a population that has been forced out of housing for many issues. Some by economics, others by addiction and mental health issues. Each of those needs to be treated differently.

We need to push Housing First initiatives and access to more vouchers, but we also have to create more group homes with supportive services – from taking their medications to various counseling needs. These small group homes need to be scattered throughout communities. This approach has been proven much more effective than the present Lifebridge/Harborlight plan to build a large warehouse of formerly homeless people as part of a campus involving a bigger homeless shelter. All that will do is stigmatize this population, make Salem a destination point for challenged individuals and overburden Salem's police, hospital and emergency services.

4. What steps can the city take to address pedestrian safety?
More enforcement of existing traffic laws. Better lighting in some areas. Traffic calming methods in other areas.

5. (Did you) Would you have voted in favor of the sanctuary for peace ordinance?
YES/NO
What purpose is there in reigniting this issue?

(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?

Building a better and broader public transportation would help but let's be realistic, the majority of people here aren't giving up their cars and jumping on bikes, and many are incapable of either. This isn't a major city and people need cars to commute to places without direct rail, bus or ferry lines. They need vehicles for shopping and visiting. Exploring beaches, taking day trips, driving to the mountains are part of the lure of living

in this area. Ironically, the Salem I grew up in back in the 60's was a much more

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pedestrian friendly place – with better public transport and a downtown that had everything you'd ever need. I find it difficult to walk downtown and buy any basic necessities, such as underwear.

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

Invest in it and fix it. I'm not an engineer but will learn more about this and have better answers once I meet with DPW and am on the council.

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?

City leadership can be more consistent with environmental policies and do a better job promoting practical solutions.

The City is pushing initiatives to lower carbon footprints and get cars off the road, while also pushing development projects on land predicted to be flooded in the very near future. Avoiding construction on flood plains is a straightforward policy; ignoring science means we face a costly uphill battle in the future.

We need to improve communications and meet people halfway on lowering carbon footprints by making solutions practical, rather than political, costly, or elitist. A few ideas that will help are installing solar panels on public buildings; better incentivizing the switch from fossil fuels; developing a more robust public transportation and ride share system; promoting and lowering the cost of composting for residents and restaurants.

Personally, simply ditching our dryer for an old-school clothesline has kept our electricity bill really low.

4. Do you oppose the creation of new fossil fuel infrastructure in Salem?

YES and NO

5. Do you support the fare-free trolley program? **YES**

6. Do you support the expansion of the City's curbside composting pickup program? **YES**

7. Do you support the offshore wind project? **YES with stipulations**

8. Do you support continuing the existing Blue Bikes program? **Maintain without a long term contract – research other vendors**

9. Do you support the City's partnership with Boston Harbor Cruises offering ferry service to and from Boston? **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

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users? **I need to read more about this. “Zero fatalities” sounds unrealistic and I know from living in NYC that bikes and particularly quiet electric bikes can be as dangerous to pedestrians as cars**

(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?

Expensive and unattractive towers are rising all around us with but a handful of “affordable units” based on Boston’s AMI

We need to free ourselves from the grasp of greed-driven developers intent on building outsized ugly buildings, as well as the politicians and think tanks that support them. We need to give incentives to homeowners offering affordable units. We need to create live/work spaces for the artists, musicians, writers and creatives who add much to our life and our local dialogue. We need to find developers open to considering concepts like land trusts, cooperative housing, shared equity and rent to own programs. If we can’t find the right partners to build what we want, we need to be patient and wait for better opportunities.

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

I do not know what City-owned lands might be available, but public lands like playgrounds and parks should remain as such.

3. Do you support rent stabilization? **YES/ NO** if yes how would you help stabilize it?

Currently, the State forbids cities from doing this – this is a state issue.

4. How do you plan to address the intersection of homelessness and soaring housing prices?

Homelessness needs to be addressed in every single community, not just one working class neighborhood and one city. There are no homeless shelters in Marblehead, Manchester, Beverly Farms and other wealthy communities where the Lifebridge Board lives. That’s not a coincidence, just like it’s not a coincidence that Lifebridge has not a single Salem resident on its

board other than a police officer. This is an issue of haves and have nots; of class divides; of wealth and power. It's a story of wealthy individuals with good intentions using their tax write-offs to keep society's problems far from their doorsteps.

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Our governor and lieutenant governor suggest people using spare rooms to put up people needing housing. Grand Idea. I would suggest they consider the mansions on Marblehead Neck as a starting point – plenty of empty rooms there. Our problem isn't a lack of housing, it's a lack of distribution.

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**
6. Do you support implementing an inclusionary development policy (IDP) in Salem at 10% as has been discussed to date? **Higher %**
7. Do you Support the ending of mandatory minimum parking requirements for new construction? **NO**
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**
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? **NO**

(H) Economic Opportunity

1. What steps would you propose to reduce Salem's income and wealth inequality, especially the racial wealth gap?
City Council is going to solve this?
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**
3. What steps can the Council take to achieve greater diversity in City contracting?

Hire more minority contractors.

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?

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The original promise from the state was that there would be some sort of push in this business for minority owners. The buy-in price to compensate for all the regulations was so steep that it excluded a lot of potential owners. Relaxing some of those regulations may help.

(I) Democracy

1. How can Salem increase turnout in municipal elections?

Low voter turnout is indicative of the fact that many people feel they no longer have a voice.

I am not aligning myself with any politicians, I am aligning myself with the people of my Ward. They are my only true responsibility. I expect to hold regular public meetings to keep updated on issues in the Ward. I would like to form committees of Ward residents to counsel me regularly on various needs. I'd also like to create a Youth Council made up of youngsters 18 and under to hear their concerns and ideas.

Bringing transparency, accessibility, energy, and an innovative approach to governing will remind people that their vote does count, and that change is truly possible. When people feel like they are included, they become invested and act on behalf of their community. Those actions include voting.

2. How can the council increase transparency?

Allow public access to meetings. Allow public comment at all meetings. Regular meetings with the public that report on council activities.

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

Trying to convince people I'm worth a vote and that I will make a difference.

4. Do you support allowing non-citizens with legal status the right to vote in municipal elections? **YES/ NO State issue**

5. Do you support allowing 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in municipal elections? **YES/ NO State issue**

6. Would you support Charter Change to allow for Ranked Choice Voting in

Salem? **NO**

7. Do you support making hybrid access to public meetings permanent? **YES**

(J) Additional Comments

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

