

# 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? [My top three priorities are affordable housing, worker's rights and bold climate crisis action.](#)
  
0. What qualifies you to hold this office? [My many years of activism and advocacy have prepared me well for this job. Having been the lead organizer for many marches and protests, I know how to bring a coalition together for a common cause. I became a policy wonk through my work on ballot initiatives and lobbying the state house and a seasoned campaigner volunteering for many progressive candidates.](#)
  
0. What do you see as the role of the City Council in Salem? [I believe that the city council must embrace its transformational potential and take on a more expanded role in addressing big issues. Local leaders have a responsibility to address things like road and sidewalk repairs with a sense of urgency, but we must also be willing to make the bold changes around issues like the housing crisis and the move towards clean energy that this moment requires of us .](#)
  
0. What is the one policy you've seen pioneered in another city that you'd most like to see Salem adopt? [The city of Lynn passed a wage theft ordinance in 2018 and created a wage theft council. As someone who has been the victim of wage theft in the restaurant industry, I'm excited to see Salem considering a similar move and would be honored to be a vote to pass that measure and others like it to protect Salem's workers.](#)

0. What does community service mean to you? It's been a privilege to knock on thousands of doors across the city and hear about the many ways in which people choose to give back to their community from folks on the beautification committee to those volunteering at the YMCA and the Salem pantry. Delivering meals with Age Span has been an amazing experience for me personally and it serves as a good reminder for why I'm working towards a position in public service.

## **(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 was proud to organize a black lives matter protest in Salem to honor the life of Tyre Nichols. We were joined by many city councilors, the now mayor and other racial justice advocates. I arranged for Rev. Andre Bennett to speak at the event and we were able to spark an important conversation about the need for police reform in Salem and across the north shore. If innocent people can be murdered for being black in Memphis, Minneapolis and Louisville, it can happen here and it is our responsibility to be proactive in reexamining and reimagining the role of police and their relationship with the community,

0. 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? Engaging diverse communities is exactly what I've done as an activist and what I'll continue to do as a policymaker. When I organized the Boston March For Medicare For All, I brought together over 100 people, mostly uninsured, to march from Nubian Square to the state house. There were members in attendance from Our Revolution, Nurses United and Incorruptible Mass. I worked with a hispanic boston city council candidate to organize the event who was able to yell out our chants in spanish and translate other aspects of the event. At the steps of the state house, I had invited several speakers including state senators and reps, candidates for office and other activists that were supportive of the policy. Going forward, I'm willing to reach out and work with any and everyone to accomplish progressive policy goals and I'm committed to leaving no community out of the room.

0. 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 think that the lack of youth representation in government is a contributing factor in youth engagement. When young people don't see folks their age in office that can relate with their struggles, that breeds a lot of apathy. In addition to being relatively young, I am committed to driving young people into the voting process and will push for youth representation on Salem's boards and

committees. We should elevate the groups that are already doing important work in youth engagement and fund ways to get voter information to young people in an easy, accessible way on the platforms that they're on.

0. What do you think it means to be an ally of the LGBTQ+ community? *As a gay man with two moms, It's fair to say I am more than an ally. At a time when anti LGBTQ+ rhetoric and legislation is making an unfortunate comeback, we need leaders that are vigilant and ready to call out bigoted dog whistles and talking points. Salem residents should never need to question whether any of their elected officials tolerate hate.*

0. 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 would have enthusiastically voted yes because mobility and quality education are rights that people deserve regardless of their documentation status.*

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

1. What opportunities do you see for the city to raise revenue? *I am an advocate of progressive taxation. Things like real estate transaction fees, short term rental fees and a vacant property tax are great ways that other cities have been able to fund affordable housing initiatives. It is also crucial for Salem to remain a place where businesses thrive and to do what we can to support small businesses.*

### **(D) Education**

1. What are your top priorities for reducing persistent racial and economic achievement gaps in the Salem Public Schools? *We need to understand that every student learns differently and has different educational needs. The high number of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those learning English as a second language requires us to be thoughtful about the challenges that standardized testing and homework creates. It is crucial to hire a diverse school staff and to elect school committee members from different backgrounds that understand these challenges, and for the city to provide the resources that are needed.*

0. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools in Salem? **YES**

0. What steps would you take to raise the school rating for the Salem Public School System as a whole? We need to hire more bilingual teachers. With a 57% hispanic student body, we can not expect to raise our school rating without meaningfully addressing the language barrier for many of our students. We must also pay our teachers more, not only because they deserve more but because our inability to retain our educators is driven in part by their low pay relative to surrounding communities.

## **(E) Public Safety**

1. Would you advocate for the reallocation of money from the Salem Police Department budget to be reinvested in communities? **YES**

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

At \$23M our public safety budget significantly dwarfs every other line item other than schools. I would absolutely support reallocating some funding towards a number of social programs to address the root causes of crime and to alleviate systemic income inequality. We should also recognize that police are not the best equipped to deal with every public safety concern and instead utilize professionals in dealing with unhoused people, mental health and addiction whenever possible.

0. Do you support the legalization of overdose prevention centers? **YES**

0. What steps would you take to address homelessness in Salem? In addition to supporting current housing projects and our relationship with organizations like Lifebridge and Harborlight, I would fight for a rapid expansion of city-funded public housing for both the unhoused population and the growing number of housing insecure and cost-burdened families in Salem. I support a housing first approach and reject the discrimination of people based on struggles with mental health care and addiction and support an increase in funding and resources for those issues.

0. What steps can the city take to address pedestrian safety? Every street needs to be safe for every person regardless of mode of transportation. Knocking on doors across the city has given me an insight into the lack of safety in different parts of the city where traffic calming measures and better signage are clearly needed. I also find it unacceptable that many sidewalks remain unsafe for elderly and disabled people due to a lack of wheelchair friendly infrastructure and general neglect. I am committed to working towards making Salem a safer and more walkable city.

0. (Did you) Would you have voted in favor of the sanctuary for peace ordinance?  
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? Moving towards mixed use zoning is a crucial piece of the puzzle as many neighborhoods in Salem are not within walking distance to grocery stores, and other services and attractions due to restrictive zoning. I am very supportive of initiatives like the Salem Skipper and feel that it is vital for the city to not only find permanent funding for it but to also work with nearby municipalities to expand it and use it to continue to improve affordable mobility. Affordable housing is another important aspect as many people that work in Salem, particularly teachers, restaurant workers and healthcare workers, can not afford to live in Salem which significantly contributes to the number of cars on our roads. I strongly support the steps we've taken with additional bike lanes and blue bikes and would like for us to add additional bike racks around the city as well. The bottom line is that when we continue to allow cars to be necessary to navigate through our city, we simply are not taking the climate crisis, among other issues, seriously.

0. What are your plans long term to address the city's aging water pipe infrastructure? There's no way around the fact that our water pipes are very old and in need of repair. This is very much a national problem as well as an expensive problem. The Infrastructure Investment And Jobs Act put \$50M towards funding for repairing water infrastructure and this is money that we should be applying for.

0. 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? 1. Every city building that can transition to renewable energy should be undergoing that process immediately and stronger incentives should be given to homeowners to make that transition as well.

2. We should follow Mayor Wu's lead in mandating stronger energy efficiency standards and banning fossil fuels from new buildings.

3. We must continue to seek opportunities like the offshore wind project that can speed up our independence from fossil fuels.

I've always believed that overcoming the climate crisis can be an opportunity to overcome economic inequality as well. Green infrastructure projects create jobs and it is our responsibility to do everything we can to make sure that Salem residents get a lot of those jobs. Clean air, water and public spaces have to be a priority for us, particularly in low income and diverse communities in an effort to reject environmental racism and classism.

- 0. Do you oppose the creation of new fossil fuel infrastructure in Salem? **YES**
  
- 0. Do you support the fare-free trolley program? **YES**
  
- 0. Do you support the expansion of the City's curbside composting pickup program? **YES**
  
- 0. Do you support the offshore wind project? **YES**
  
- 0. Do you support continuing the existing Blue Bikes program? **Expand**
  
- 0. Do you support the City's partnership with Boston Harbor Cruises offering ferry service to and from Boston? **YES**
  
- 0. 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**

## **(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 absolutely agree and feel that parking requirements, unit size, and restrictive zoning are all ways that the city is currently getting in the way of both housing production and making sure that that housing production results in more affordability.**
  
- 0. What opportunities do you see for leveraging city-owned land for expanding market rate and Affordable housing? **When dealing with city-owned land, it becomes easier to create projects where the need for a third party to profit is taken out of the equation. The conversion of the old courthouse on Federal street is an example of innovative ways we can create affordable housing with the city buildings**

already in existence. I'm also very supportive of the right of first refusal program and ideas like it to increase the percentage of city owned buildings and therefore increase our affordable housing stock. We should also be utilizing any undeveloped or underdeveloped city land and continue to work with partners like North Shore CDC to create more beautiful buildings full of high quality, affordable units. Finally, the creation of land trusts would give the city more of an ability to use our land for our priorities and increase the public benefit of the development that we would see within it.

0. Do you support rent stabilization? **YES** if yes how would you help stabilize it? I believe that again Mayor Wu's rent stabilization proposal is one Salem should look towards. Making sure that landlords are not able to jack up prices more than 10% in a single year is more than reasonable and without that assurance, renters are always at risk of eviction by price gouging. Her proposal also includes other basic protections such as just cause evictions.

0. How do you plan to address the intersection of homelessness and soaring housing prices? There is a clear correlation between the price of housing and the increase in the homeless population. We need affordable options on every income level which means an increase in public housing, an increase in "starter homes" which have all but disappeared from the market and a comprehensive set of policies including rent-stabilization to prevent displacement and an increase in housing insecurity.

0. 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**

0. Do you support implementing an inclusionary development policy (IDP) in Salem at 10% as has been discussed to date? **Higher %**

0. Do you Support the ending of mandatory minimum parking requirements for new construction? **YES**

0. 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**

0. 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**

## **(H) Economic Opportunity**

1. What steps would you propose to reduce Salem's income and wealth inequality, especially the racial wealth gap? **Creating accessible pathways to homeownership would be a major step towards closing that gap. I also believe that Salem can be doing more to support BIPOC owned businesses and follow the lead of other cities that are connecting business owners with investors, support and technical assistance. Due to the legacy of racism and discrimination, and stronger investment in social services would also disproportionately benefit families of color which is why changes to our budget are key.**
  
0. 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**
  
0. What steps can the Council take to achieve greater diversity in City contracting? **I would support an ordinance that at least 25% of our contractor spending must be allocated towards women- and minority-owned businesses.**
  
0. 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? **The victims of the drug war should be prioritized when it comes to business licenses. Rather than arresting unlicensed sellers, we should be offering them the ability to transition easily into a legal business. We should also be using tax revenue from marijuana sales to assist wrongfully imprisoned people economically recover through financial relief, job training and other forms of restorative justice for the neighborhoods most affected.**

## **(I) Democracy**

1. How can Salem increase turnout in municipal elections? **Salem needs to improve its website. It should be much easier to figure out when upcoming elections are, where to vote, what candidates will be on the ballot etc without needing to rely on news outlets. We could also send out unbiased information to every resident through mail, email or robocall where each candidate has the ability to submit a few sentences about their campaign and where to find out more. Additionally, the city should directly organize and hold debates for every election.**



0. How can the council increase transparency? **Every vote on every matter discussed in the city council should be easily accessible on the city website.**

0. What are you personally doing to increase turnout in this upcoming election? **I believe that it is important to canvas and interact with voters, even in communities where voter turnout is low because we shouldn't be perpetuating that pattern. I've also tabled outside of Salem State with voter registration forms and plan to do it again in the fall.**

0. Do you support allowing non-citizens with legal status the right to vote in municipal elections? **YES**

0. Do you support allowing 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in municipal elections? **YES**

0. Would you support Charter Change to allow for Ranked Choice Voting in Salem? **YES**

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

### **(J) Additional Comments**

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

**I believe that one thing that sets my candidacy apart is my lived experience and personal understanding of the way that much of the subject matter above affects working class people. As someone who would be the only renter on the council if elected, voters can be assured that I have an added sense of urgency when it comes to housing policy based on the fact that I myself am a cost burdened renter with homeownership far from my reach. As a long-time waiter and former Uber driver, I've personally been the victim of wage theft among other abusive labor conditions. I won't just be an ally of labor and working people, I will be personally impacted by the labor protections that the council considers, and I think that is a dynamic that is all too rare in politics, including local politics.**