



Voters for a Vibrant Newton PAC 2021 City Council Questionnaire

Thank you for completing the 2021 Voters for a Vibrant Newton PAC candidate questionnaire. To submit your answers, email a PDF copy of this document with your answers by September 9th. Answers to this questionnaire will inform our endorsement decisions and will be posted online. Please limit each answer to 150 words.

1. What are the three most important issues for the City Council to address in the next term?

Climate Change: Per the IPCC report “AR6 Climate Change 2021” we are already experiencing the climate crisis, including extreme weather events that will become more extreme and more frequent as temperatures continue to rise. Climate Change needs to be front and center of all decisions at every level of government, including local government where they can work to significantly decrease GHG associated with buildings and transportation.

Village Centers: The Council needs to move forward on Village Center Visioning. Our villages are a source of pride, provide important services and are an economic engine for Newton. But most of our villages are not living up to their potential. Visions will encourage investments in buildings, public space, infrastructure, a better mix of businesses, places for housing including affordable housing.

Transportation: More than 25% of CO₂ in Newton is from personal transportation. I championed a budget resolution to create a bicycle, pedestrian, and accessibility master plan. We have the opportunity to lay out a bold vision for transforming our car clogged streets to healthier streets, that make people safer and help Newton meet its goal to reduce vehicle miles traveled.

2. What do you see as the key elements of a vibrant village center?

Truly vibrant villages improve the quality of life in any city. They provide a place to gather and linger, catch up with neighbors and strengthen our sense of community. Vibrant villages enable businesses to thrive. They reflect history but accommodate the present. They have a mix of businesses where we can do every day errands with local merchants that we know personally. They provide housing that offers a walkable lifestyle and brings foot traffic, for the shops, restaurants and other businesses. Vibrant villages can be an important way to combat climate action. They have green spaces and restorative spaces. They encourage walking and biking and are fully accessible... They have visual and performance art and a larger gathering space for community events. Vibrant villages are what Newton needs.

3. What are the barriers to getting/keeping vibrant village centers and how would you overcome them?

The Al Fresco Dining program along with the 28 Austin St project/Bram Way Plaza have demonstrated the importance of rethinking public spaces. This is why I worked hard to support the restaurants with Al Fresco Dining. Villages on main thoroughfares require traffic calming to support people walking, biking and lingering. These same investments will help to address the many accessibility issues in the villages including sidewalks and crossings. Investing in creating additional green spaces and plantings improves the look and feel of the village.

Increasing investment by building owners is critical and requires a more defined and predictable process. Building housing in and near village centers will provide more customers for stores and employees for local businesses. Simplifying the permitting and associated zoning rules for new businesses to shrink the timeline from concept to opening will enable Newton to attract more and diverse businesses, reduce empty store fronts and encourage more local, independent businesses.

4. Have you been a consistent supporter or opponent of mixed-use developments that have been previously approved, including Northland, Austin Street, Trio, Dunstan East, Riverdale and Riverside? Please detail your thinking and your actions to support or oppose each.

I have been a consistent supporter of mixed-use developments. I supported these projects as either a City Councilor or before I was on the Council as a resident advocating for more housing. These developments all have provided opportunities to improve spaces in need of renovation and in some cases like Northland, rehabilitation of environmentally compromised spaces. The projects provide much needed housing, affordable housing, housing in walkable locations and new commercial properties. The larger projects such as Northland, Trio and Riverside will include significant public benefits in the way of new open space and investments in surrounding neighborhoods. The Northland and Riverside projects will be built to a very high standard of energy efficiency, setting higher expectations for buildings going forward. These

projects were also all subjected to vigorous public process and detailed review by either the City Councilor or the Zoning Board of Appeals.

5. What steps would you take to encourage more diverse and locally owned businesses in our City?

The permitting and associated zoning rules for new businesses can be complicated and delay businesses from opening for many, many months. Large corporate entities can more likely handle the financial impact of a delay, but smaller businesses are more likely to open their businesses in other communities. We should be streamlining the review and special permit process in an effort to shorten the timeline from application to opening, enabling Newton to be more competitive with neighboring communities, reduce empty store fronts and encourage more local, independent businesses. Village Centers that are inviting and designed for safe walking increase foot traffic for businesses. Supporting pop-up businesses and incubator spaces for new companies is another important way to support small businesses. Lastly, we must make Newton more welcoming for business owners and their employees by increasing housing options and greater affordability.

6. How would you use housing tools to further economic and racial equity in Newton, specifically for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)?

Newton has work to do to become a welcoming and attainable place for all to live, especially BIPOC, (see my answer to question #8). In addition, the housing crisis disproportionately affects BIPOC, and the measures I've outlined to address the housing crisis will also help to mitigate conditions that have traditionally created barriers to BIPOC being able to live in many communities.

Newton also has an opportunity with ARPA funds to develop a more robust Fair Housing program that includes housing stabilization, testing, addressing barriers for families using vouchers, financial readiness and home ownership support.

7. What percentage of local preference in affordable housing lotteries do you support?

Research of Newton's local preference policy shows the policy favors white applicants. Brookline has changed their policy to 25%. The Newton Housing Partnership has called for more study of the issue. I also appreciate those concerned that if the local preference percentage goes too low, local support for future projects will be reduced. I am supportive of a reduction and support further study to determine the ideal percentage. The research also indicated that 50% of the accessible units went to people who did not need an accessible unit despite there being many people who need accessible housing being in the pool. To the extent possible accessible housing should be allocated to people who qualify. Also noted was a difference between those who won the lottery and those tenants that eventually signed a lease, indicating there is something blocking more applicants of color from actually being able to rent. Further study on this is warranted.

8. What actions or measures beyond increasing affordable housing would you take to advance racial equity and promote an inclusive Newton?

During the past two Juneteenth events, Black student leaders have called on the community, Newton Public Schools, School Committee, and the Mayor to create a more equitable and inclusive environment in our schools. Among the concerns raised by the students was feeling that their concerns were not taken seriously enough and actions taken they did not improve the situation for Black students. This lack of progress makes it difficult to Black students to believe that meaningful action around racism will ever occur in our schools.

The Police Reform Task Force has many important recommendations that should be acted upon including creating a Newton Police Committee. This committee's first priority would be to create an ongoing dialogue and mutual accountability between the Newton community and the Newton Police Department. And equally important is the third recommendation to improve training including understanding the impacts of historic, systemic racism on current policing practices.

9. What actions/changes would you support on the City Council to implement the recommendations of the Climate Action Plan?

64% of Newton's GHG are from commercial and residential buildings. Moving forward on 100% renewable energy, transitioning as fast as possible, is critical. Key initiatives: (1) Encourage solar installations on buildings and parking lots (2) Expand the Power Choice Program, encouraging more residents and businesses to opt up to 100% renewable while continuing to raise the default standard towards 100% . (3) Require 100% electrification of new and significantly renovated buildings (4) Implement BERDO (Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance), rolling out initially with Newton's largest energy users.

25% of GHG in Newton are from personal transportation. Key initiatives: (1) Make it easier and safer to get around without a vehicle through the development of a bicycle, pedestrian, and accessibility master plan including protected lanes on busier streets and significant traffic calming on others (2) Continue to increase charging infrastructure for electric vehicles. (3) Support climate resiliency investments along our street network including depaving, more permeable surfaces and rain gardens

10. Do you support the current role of the City Council in issuing special permits? If not, what changes would you propose?

As a councilor on the Land Use Committee, I have seen good projects that have been made better by the special permit process. I have also seen businesses have to wait for months to come before the council for a small issue that we often waive. It is especially difficult, when this

is a small business who can't really afford the delayed opening. How many businesses have chosen to open in other cities because of our long and cumbersome special permit process that usually requires hiring a lawyer? Specific recommendations include: (1) Allow administrative approval of permits for small projects where the requested relief is small. This would be especially important for small businesses (2) Special permit process that better aligns with The Comprehensive Plan including climate action (3) Affordable housing developers can't afford the expense of a multi-year design and approval process that many Newton projects experience. I support creating a zoning overlay for 100% affordable housing with requirements and clearly defined approval process.

11. Use this space to add anything you have not mentioned and that you would like us to know about your experience, vision for Newton, etc. (150 words or fewer)

During COVID, I have worked hard to support Newton businesses, especially restaurants - encouraging the administration to plan for outdoor dining and then pushing for expanding the program to match that of other communities. I will be working to make this popular program permanent. I have organized volunteers to plant plants at restaurants and supported Councilor Noel's efforts to help restaurants build accessible dining platforms. I have supported people in our community looking to make a difference, whether it is planting trees to commemorate residents who died from COVID or people looking to bring meals to front line workers. This week, I placed five story walks in the city parks, enabling families to enjoy reading a book with their children while walking through nature, as part of a Community Pollinators Project Group that I have founded.

I appreciate the time you have taken to consider my endorsement.