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General Questions

Q1. Every candidate is talking about the housing affordability crisis. Housing costs are increasing for everyone, but renters in particular are bearing the brunt of this crisis, with many frequently spending 30, 40, and even 50% of their income on rent. What is your plan to bring down rent prices for both subsidized and market rate housing?

Answer:

I'll fight for more affordable rental units and expanded first-time homebuyer programs. I'll fight for more rental subsidies, including the city-funded voucher program, advocating for MRVP in the state budget, and securing Section 8 vouchers at every opportunity, which can all be project based and allow more affordable housing to be created. I support the affordable project acceleration certificate, which allows affordable projects to "jump the line" for ISD and other city reviews. I'd also like to ensure that when major publicly-owned parcels of land are developed they are predominantly deeply affordable. This needs to include permanent supportive housing to help families exiting homelessness achieve long-term stability. We also need to tackle real zoning reform to improve predictability of the building approval process. As someone who grew up in a rent controlled apartment in New York, I support reasonable rent stabilization policies that limit the risk of dramatic rent increases.



Q2. A 2023 report commissioned by the Boston Planning Department found that the Boston Zoning Code is “bloated, outdated, inconsistent, and inequitable.” At over 4,000 pages, it is layered with districts, sub-districts, and other confusing variations that make most new development, from the smallest additions to large multi-family projects, more expensive and time-consuming than they need to be. What efforts do you support to simplify the zoning code and create consistent standards across the City?

Answer:

I am for transparent zoning districts that clearly communicate to our developers what we are looking for and where. An effective initiative has been the Squares + Streets initiative because it not only fosters community but clarifies and visualizes the zoning code for developers. So let's continue this work into other districts such as Neighborhood Design Districts and Boulevard Districts. One of the biggest challenges is that the City Council does not have direct control of the zoning code, rather the Zoning Commission does. This little-known board holds an incredible amount of power, and I would seek to reform it.

Q3. What specific housing policy initiatives will you prioritize as an elected official?

Answer:

Zoning and community process reform is an area that I'd like to work on.



Current City Policy

Q4. Since the Squares and Streets initiative was launched in Q3 of 2023, one new district has been approved in Roslindale Square. What does it do well and how should it be improved? Which neighborhoods should be after Roslindale and why?

Answer:

I like how clearly it outlines the zoning for developers and residents, while incorporating the community throughout the process with engagement and resources in multiple languages. It should be improved by having the process incorporated to other districts. I would defer to residents and planners on which neighborhood to pursue next, but I'm interested in seeing the process continue.

Q5. Boston's new Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP), which went into effect in October 2024, raised the affordability requirements for new residential buildings requiring zoning relief and changed the structures of the cashout and off-site options. What do you think the impact of the new IDP policy has been?

Answer:

I am generally supportive of the IDP as it currently exists. I am open to some tweaks as needed, to ensure that it does not become too big of a stumbling block to housing creation, but I would strive to maintain or even increase the percentage requirements, particularly in downtown core communities. There are many pressures on the speed of housing creation, and I believe that the correlation some have pointed to may not equate to causation. The reality is that many projects have long included higher affordability percentages than the IDP requires, as demanded by residents, and I would support these efforts where possible.



Q6. This past December, the Boston City Council hosted members of the Austin City Council for a two-day visit, during which the Austin City Councilors presented recent zoning changes they enacted that resulted in increased housing production and lowered rents. Austin has made national headlines as one of the few cities in the US to see rents decrease over the past year. After a building boom resulting from these reforms, rents fell by more than 20% year over year from August 2023 to August 2024. Do you support Austin-style zoning reforms as a strategy for bringing down home prices?

Answer:

I would be interested in learning more about several of these policies and Austin's experience. I am generally supportive of substantial parking reforms (including the potential elimination of parking minimums, especially near transit), and I am very supportive of a density bonus for affordable housing. While no two cities are the same, I believe that these kinds of reforms could have a substantial impact.

AHMA's Vision for Boston

Q7. The Affordable Homes Act signed by Governor Healey last summer legalized Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) everywhere in the state except Boston. ADUs have frequently been cited as a "win/win/win" way to create much needed new homes, while providing rental income and/or multigenerational housing opportunities for homeowners. Do you support or oppose legalizing ADUs by right citywide? If so, what should the timeline be for implementation?

Answer:

Yes, I support allowing ADUs by right citywide. ADUs make a whole lot of sense for a number of different populations, from parents to adult children with disabilities and many more. I support allowing ADUs in non-owner occupied properties as well. We should also pass zoning policies with this to ensure that these units are safe for residents.



Q8. There is a large body of research showing that parking minimums add significantly to the cost of development, which leads to higher rents and home prices. In 2021, the City eliminated parking mandates for affordable housing citing the cost of such requirements and because it gave the homebuilder the ability to provide parking that matches the needs of the residents, rather than an outdated and arbitrary city formula. Do you support or oppose expanding the elimination of costly parking mandates to all new residential development?

Answer:

Yes, if developers are noticing a lack of demand for parking amenities, they shouldn't be required to include it. To avoid a "tragedy of the commons," I would support restricting the ability of residents in large, new developments near transit to participate in the residential parking program if the developer does not build parking, and require that all potential tenants or unit owners be notified of these conditions as part of their purchase. This is only fair to other residents.

Q9. The City of Boston's population has been growing steadily for the past three decades. As this trend continues, we will need to build a lot more homes to ensure that current and future residents can afford to live here. To that end, do you support or oppose allowing residential construction up to 6 stories by-right citywide?

Answer:

I believe that the answer to this has to depend on the neighborhood. Unlike Cambridge, large sections of Boston do not have any rapid transit near them, and a 1-to-6 unit conversion could have a significant impact that has to be evaluated. I do believe that upzoning would help stimulate housing creation, and increase the tax base for the city. However, it could lead to displacement, particularly in Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing, if no steps are taken to curtail that result. I believe that to pursue this path, we must implement a policy that will limit displacement.



Q10. A recent study from Boston Indicators and Transit Matters found that Boston does not build enough housing around public transportation to support a high-functioning system. Given the reliance of Boston residents on public transportation, do you support or oppose permitting residential construction up to 12 stories by right citywide within 1/2 rapid transit, commuter rail, and bus stations?

Answer:

I believe that we need substantial upzoning near transit. I'd need to dive into the data to determine if I support those exact parameters, but I'm open to the concept and potentially on that scale if warranted. As we learned from the MBTA Communities Act response, we need bold action that is sometimes unpopular to achieve critical results.

