



Candidate Name: Shawn Nelson

District: 7

Email: NelsonShawn4@gmail.com

Website: shawn4district7.com

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:

The City Council can help bring down rent by pushing for more housing options that meet different income levels. I support building more affordable housing, including through community land trusts and limited-equity co-ops, which help keep rents stable long-term. I also support expanding accessory dwelling units (like basement apartments) and using vacant city-owned properties for affordable development. We should also audit big nonprofits to make sure they're paying their fair share through the PILOT program, and use that funding to support housing. I don't support rent control, but I do support smart policies that lower costs while protecting tenants.



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 A 2023 report commissioned by the Boston Planning Department found that the Boston Zoning Code is “bloated, outdated, inconsistent, and inequitable.”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 support a full rewrite of Boston’s zoning code to make it simpler, fairer, and easier to follow. Right now, it’s over 4,000 pages long and filled with outdated rules that slow down building and drive up costs. We need clear, consistent standards across the city so homeowners, builders, and communities know what to expect. This will make it easier to build more housing especially multi-family and affordable homes without jumping through unnecessary hoops. Simplifying the zoning code is a key step in making housing more accessible for everyone.

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

Answer:

I will prioritize expanding ADUs citywide, supporting transit-oriented and appropriately taller development, promoting community-driven housing solutions like co-ops, and ensuring developers contribute to affordable housing without stalling projects.



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:

The Squares and Streets initiative is doing well by improving public spaces and making neighborhoods more walkable. It could be improved by prioritizing community input and better traffic management. After Roslindale, I would focus on neighborhoods like Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, and Mattapan, where busy commercial areas and high pedestrian traffic mean community-led improvements would have the greatest impact.

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:

The new IDP policy is a step in the right direction because it strengthens affordability requirements and pushes developers to contribute more to affordable housing. However, it's important to monitor its impact closely as overly strict requirements can slow down development or push projects out of Boston. I support balancing strong affordability goals with policies that encourage responsible development so we can actually build more housing while keeping it accessible.

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:

Yes, I believe Boston should adopt similar zoning reforms, tailored to fit the unique needs of our city, to increase housing supply and help lower rents.



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 legalizing ADUs in Boston. The city should not be excluded from this law, especially given our housing shortage, and implementation should happen as quickly as possible.

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:

I oppose eliminating parking requirements for all new housing. While costs are important, Boston residents still depend on cars, and without adequate parking, new developments will worsen congestion and competition for limited street spaces.



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:

Support. I support allowing taller residential buildings, including up to six stories, because Boston needs more housing to keep up with our growing population. Adding additional buildings will help address the housing shortage and can help reduce overall costs. At the same time, residents should have input on how high buildings go in their neighborhoods so growth is balanced with community priorities.

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'm neither opposed nor in favor of this proposal. This question is similar to one I've already been asked about building taller housing. While I understand the argument for allowing up to 12-story buildings near public transit, I also know this is a sensitive issue for many neighborhoods. Boston is a landlocked city, and there's no doubt that we will need more housing including taller buildings in some areas to meet demand. But I believe these decisions should not be made top-down. They should be led by residents in each neighborhood, coming together to decide what works best for their community. As a councilor, I will make sure those voices are heard first.

