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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:

Housing affordability is the foundation for families to thrive, and we need to use every tool available to make progress. I'll continue to focus on building and preserving affordable housing; creating new public housing units; investing in housing production at a time when the private market is not delivering the homes we need; fighting for rent stabilization and tenant protections; implementing City planning and zoning for predictability to support housing production and climate resilience; and expanding opportunities for first-time home buyers. Since the start of my administration, the City has helped more than 1,000 households buy homes, including through downpayment and closing cost assistance and mortgage interest rate writedowns, 61% of whom are BIPOC households, and funded the building of 811 new affordable homes for sale. In fact, 2022-24 saw the highest three-year total of income-restricted homeownership units built and in construction in the last 25 years. Going forward, Boston has 1,050 additional income-restricted homeownership units in the pipeline. We expanded the One Plus Boston mortgage program and increased down payment assistance to first-time, first-generation, and BHA homebuyers, and we launched the BHA First Home Program to support public housing and Section 8 residents in supporting homes, which has already supported 84 residents purchase their first home, more than 95% of whom are BIPOC.



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 A 2023 report commissioned by the Boston Planning Department found that the Boston Zoning Code is “bloated, outdated, inconsistent, and inequitable.”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:

In addition to launching that report and then subsequently kicking off the first citywide rezoning processes in 60 years, I signed an ordinance to create the City's first Planning Department for the first time in 70 years, restoring planning as a core function of City government. The formal transfer of BPDA staff to the Planning Department went into effect on July 1, 2024, and the new Planning Department is responsible for planning, zoning, development review, urban design, and real estate. Our Planning Advisory Council guides a shared vision for a green, growing, family-friendly Boston and coordinates investments in the built environment to realize that vision, with more affordable housing produced under our administration than Boston has seen in a generation. Last year, the Planning Department launched the citywide planning and zoning initiative Squares + Streets, and earlier this year, we were thrilled to see the first small area plan formally adopted by the BPDA Board. With planning for the public realm and public benefit part of its core mission, the Planning Department's Squares + Streets process aligns with the strategies identified in our first-ever anti-displacement plan to ensure that we are appropriately mitigating against residential, commercial and cultural displacement. Our administration has codified several of these planning areas into the zoning code, representing the first planning processes that have been incorporated into zoning in several decades. Our teams have been holding regular focus groups in neighborhoods to ensure input from all our residents informs how we plan, design and build for Boston's growth. By updating zoning regulations, the City aims to break down barriers and foster more flexible housing solutions.

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

Answer:

I am focused on using every tool in the toolbox to tackle our housing affordability crisis. My administration has been focused on stabilizing the housing market through new residential development and rezoning, with a particular focus on creating more affordable homes for low- and moderate-income residents. We've been working to reduce racial disparities in housing, and to create new opportunities that support wealth creation for BIPOC residents through new homeownership opportunities and participation in development of public land. We are also focused on ensuring our housing policies prioritize walkability, public transit access, and a reduction of the carbon footprint of Boston's residential buildings.



I am focused on making Boston a more family-friendly city, one that works for everyone, with housing as abundant and varied as our people. Over the past four years, we've focused on a number of significant efforts to expand housing: including using vacant city land for affordable housing creation, creating a new sustainable social housing model to create government-owned and -operated long-term affordable housing, rezoning Boston to allow for thoughtful transit-oriented growth, modernizing our development process, and incentivizing office to residential conversions.

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:

Transforming Roslindale Square into a robust, family-friendly neighborhood center is critical in our work to make Boston a home for everyone. In the Roslindale Square plan area, there is significant opportunity to build more housing options for Bostonians to support beloved local businesses, and stimulate demand for new small businesses. The main goals of this plan are to strengthen community connections, activate public spaces with more diverse social opportunities and mixed-income housing, and to encourage growth. I'm grateful to every community member who helped shape the squares and streets process and to the Planning Department for ensuring that this new zoning truly reflects community input, supports the neighborhood's small businesses, and enables more housing to be built for residents and families.

My administration is committed to building on this momentum across Boston, in Cleary Square in Hyde Park, in Fields Corner and Codman Square in Dorchester, and beyond. In addition, I am proud that we have completed and passed zoning to create new opportunities for housing in neighborhoods across Boston, from East Boston and Charlestown to Mattapan. We will continue to ensure we create opportunities for our neighborhoods to grow.



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:

As Boston becomes increasingly unaffordable, housing production in the city must meet the needs of everyone so all residents can call Boston home. Inclusionary Zoning is an important tool to ensure that new housing isn't only for our highest-income residents. Boston continues to take every action to urgently tackle the housing crisis displacing families and threatening the future of our community and economy. We are encouraged to see market-rate housing production reinvigorated, and we must use this opportunity to also bolster our affordable housing stock. While market conditions continue to improve, we're working with developers on a case by case basis to understand the obstacles they face to starting construction and we are extending flexibility to support their projects in moving forward.

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:

My administration is committed to looking for good ideas from across the country, and around the world to help tackle our housing crisis. We are already at work on efforts to modernize Article 80 to ensure that we streamline the development review process for good projects that meet our city goals; to speed up the permitting of affordable housing, and through our squares and streets initiatives to support transit oriented development that can help our City grow.



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 before implementation?

Answer:

ADUs are a critical piece of our housing strategy, and my administration has been working toward removing barriers in the zoning code for their creation, starting with the neighborhoods with the largest lot sizes and then phasing this in citywide. By creating more flexible and affordable living options, ADUs allow homeowners to maximize their property while contributing to the availability of housing in our neighborhoods. Last year, we also announced a new program to support Boston homeowners in building ADUs on their property by offering a new bank loan option alongside grants and other financial assistance to help residents design, permit, and build an ADU. This initiative not only supports families looking to generate extra income or house loved ones but also strengthens our communities with more diverse and accessible housing choices.

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 signed into law a legislative measure for the elimination of parking mandates for affordable housing in Boston. That action has helped take down barriers to the creation of new affordable housing all across the city. I know we need every tool in our toolbox to address our city's housing crisis. We will continue to work toward reducing vehicle reliance by ensuring more safe multimodal options for commuters, continuing to move away from parking minimums and more broadly removing outdated standards from our zoning code, and boosting new housing to make it easier for Bostonians to live and stay in our city.



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:

There is much we can do to rightsize Boston's zoning, and ensure thoughtful infill housing throughout our neighborhoods. Because Boston's current zoning does not reflect our city, right now more than 97% of new smaller scale residential buildings go through an expensive and time consuming variance process just to get permission to update or expand their existing homes.

My administration is focused on new residential zoning which will set clear, straightforward rules that better reflect the city's housing needs and goals, making the process easier and more predictable for everyone. Our planning processes look to facilitate greater as-of-right density in the appropriate places in our neighborhoods and Downtown, which will include neighborhood-specific processes including those underway. The Planning Department is working on a study now to support neighborhood-specific goals based on an assessment of existing housing stock and the specific community needs of each neighborhood.

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:

With an ongoing housing crisis and a growing population, my administration takes seriously the need for a significant expansion of the housing supply to promote a resilient, affordable, and equitable city for all Bostonians. While expanding access to housing options is by itself essential, we've made a focus of intentionally encouraging housing production in transit-accessible squares and main streets through our Squares + Streets rezoning initiative. This effort is focused on realizing the linked benefits of housing production in Boston's transit-accessible squares and main streets.

We know that when housing is built in locations that offer an abundance of commercial, civic, cultural, and transportation resources, our residents and business owners will see many benefits beyond access to housing. Our approach has been to take a balanced approach to growth across squares and streets focus areas across Boston, encouraging new in-fill housing and small business growth.

