



2025 Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Alice Merkl (she/her)

Office Sought: Councillor at Large, Salem MA

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(A) Your Candidacy

1. What would be your top three priorities if elected to serve?

Housing Crisis

Climate Crisis

Public Health/Safety

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

My extensive volunteer work to address housing and food insecurity, and my lived experience, allows me to bring an informed, in touch voice to the Council. Also during my last two terms serving on the council, I've supported legislation to prevent wage theft, increase our affordable housing stock, uphold protections for people seeking reproductive and gender affirming care, protections for our LGBTQIA+ community (particularly our Transgender community), initiatives to combat climate change, and attended Know Your Rights trainings and taken other actions to protect our immigrant community members.

3. What is the one policy you've seen pioneered in another city that you'd most like to adopt locally?

Eliminating or greatly reducing zoning restrictions which are a barrier to creating desperately needed housing.

(B) Open-Ended Policy Questions

1. Given state law, municipalities in Massachusetts are limited in their taxing power. What opportunities do you see for the city to raise revenue to support essential city services?

Pursuing every opportunity for grants at the state and federal level, and supporting responsible development to increase our tax base.

2. What are your top priorities for ensuring that all students in your city can receive a high-quality public education?

Supporting our teachers and school staff, increasing staff diversity, expanding our Career and Technical Education programs, making sure the annual budget for our schools is sufficient, supporting our School Committee, and also supporting our proposal for a new high school here in Salem.

3. What can your city do to help protect immigrant communities under attack from ICE and ensure genuine community safety?

With the current hostile and harmful actions being taken at the federal level against our immigrant communities, keeping all our residents safe is crucial right now. As I mentioned above, I've attended several Know Your Rights trainings, and we have put city policies in place that assure all residents feel welcome to engage with our city government and police without being asked their immigration status or any other questions of that nature. I have participated in neighborhood association meetings with immigration lawyers and law enforcement to ensure people know their rights and have the Red Card available to them.

4. What are your top three policy priorities for making your city climate-resilient, and how would you ensure that equity is at the center of any such efforts?

Create policies for greener, net zero buildings such as our Green Building Ordinance for municipal properties; develop adaptation plans to ensure long-term sustainability of coastal areas including improving infrastructure, seawalls, and living shorelines to increase stabilization; and eliminate or greatly reduce required parking space minimums which not only helps create more housing, it reduces paved areas increasing green space and data shows it reduces the number of cars people own. We must also be mindful that vulnerable communities are disproportionately harmed by the climate crisis and our actions to address climate change must include recognizing and addressing systemic racial and economic inequities.

5. What steps would you take to reduce dependence on cars and better facilitate the ability of city residents to safely get around by walking, biking, or public transit?

As I mentioned in the last question, I strongly support the elimination/reduction of required parking space minimums for development. Studies show this reduces the number of cars people own. I've been a strong supporter of our city ride-share program called the Skipper with a very low fee for our residents. We are also constantly looking to add and improve our bike lanes, and I support the proposal to create an additional train stop on our MBTA commuter rail line. I also lead by example using my electric scooter as my regular transportation, and have participated in Green Vehicle Expos with my scooter.

6. What policies will you advocate for to ensure that your city can be a place that is affordable for residents to live at any stage of life?

The housing crisis has definitely impacted our residents here in Salem. Many are housing insecure and are one paycheck away from being unhoused. I am a strong advocate for the initiatives we are working on or have recently put in place with our Housing Production Plan to help stabilize the market and incentivize creating more affordable units. These initiatives include our Inclusionary Zoning ordinance, Condo Conversion ordinance, Accessory Dwelling Units, reduction of residential parking minimums, increasing single room occupancy zoning, creating 40R Smart Growth districts, tax increment financing (TIF) agreements, changes in zoning that are barriers to creating more housing, and allowing exemptions for developments that include a high percentage of affordable units.

7. [If relevant] How would you assess your city's MBTA Communities Act rezoning efforts so far?

We were in compliance without having to make any zoning changes.

8. What strategies would you employ to resist federal overreach from the Trump Administration while protecting critical services and funding for residents?

We are taking all actions within our legal power to push back on the harmful actions being taken by the Trump Administration. Our funding streams may change, but our values will not. We will continue to resist any efforts that create inequities and increase risk to our most vulnerable residents, and we continue to have a DEI Director for our city. As a City Council we have passed ordinances of protection for our immigrant and LGBTQIA+ communities in response to the actions taken by the Trump Administration. We are a very

fiscally responsible government here in Salem, and we will continue these practices and responsibly address any clawback of funds moving forward.

9. How would you model transparency and accountability if elected?

I will continue to be very accessible and responsive to my constituents whether it's by email, phone, or conversations on the sidewalk, and I send out a lengthy bi-weekly newsletter keeping our residents informed and engaged. I also regularly attend community and neighborhood association meetings to make myself available for questions and feedback regarding policy and other issues before the council.

(C) Yes/No Policy Questions

1. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools? **YES**
2. Do you support the creation of an unarmed, community-based emergency response program, separate from the Police Department, to respond to mental and behavioral health crises? **YES**
3. If your community has not already, do you support adopting the new specialized stretch code, which would require new construction and major renovations to be built to a very high-efficiency standard with all-electric (as opposed to fossil fuel) heating and cooling systems? **We passed it**
4. Do you support fare-free public transit? **YES**
5. Do you support the expansion of the network of permanent, protected bike lanes in your city? **YES**
6. Would you support a home rule petition to establish a small transfer fee on high-end real estate transactions to create dedicated funding for affordable housing production and preservation? **YES**
7. Would you support a home rule petition to enable the city to stabilize rents? **YES**
8. According to the American Library Association, in 2022 there were at least 45 attempts to restrict access to books in MA schools, disproportionately books that speak to the experiences of LGBTQ students and students of color. Would you oppose such book-banning efforts if they occurred in your city? **YES**

(D) Additional Comments

I'm proud of the many years I have spent working hard as a volunteer, activist, and now as a city councillor to advocate for the wellbeing of all our community members. We are at a critical point in time with the extremely harmful executive actions being taken by the current administration that are too long to list, human rights violations and a complete disregard for democracy and the rule of law. I am more motivated than ever to do everything I possibly can to counter these hostile actions and advocate for and keep safe our most vulnerable communities.