



2025 Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

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Office Sought: City Councillor – Ward 2

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(A) Your Candidacy

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

- a. Homelessness – a big issue with a lot of needs such as a housing first initiative (supporting the current Lifebridge/Harborlight project), building more homes that people want to live in (not unattainable luxury properties, but affordable places for families and seniors) and having locally based landlords or owner occupancy. It's not about a handout, but a leg up.
- b. Jobs of the Future – we need to be able to pivot our schools and training into AI-proof industries, like the trades and perhaps liberal arts (which may be best positioned to program Artificial intelligence over raw coders who will be obsolete). We also must make sure our wind terminal project continues as planned and try to expand green jobs amidst an unfriendly federal government.
- c. Communication – newsletters, coffee chats, town halls quarterly... I want to be accessible, accountable, and attentive to my constituents. Ward 2 needs a strong voice and stronger ears to represent their interests. I also think our city council can do a better job relaying to constituents *why* things happen the way they do. Misinformation loves a vacuum.

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

In my normal job, I work as an actor, a writer, and a professor. The training and work involved in these professions has made me a great listener. Actors and

writers are trained to listen and react, that is the foundation of the job. These professions also make me a strong speaker and can advocate for my community and help to educate folks around me on the reasoning behind why certain policies are the way they are or how to change them. My other past work experience also includes industries related to Salem: working in restaurants, as a tour company manager, and currently, as a proud union professor/educator. Additionally, I have experience across the housing spectrum as a renter, an owner, and running a rental property.

Finally, I have two kids, and while that doesn't qualify me necessarily, it does mean I am future-looking and want the best version of Salem for them to grow up in.

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

A rental registry. We have something similar, but I would like a public rental registry that goes beyond just asking landlords to sign up for inspections and allows tenants to also privately enter their information, which would help flag landlords not in compliance and even serve as a rating system. It would also help to determine where fair market rents stand, provide a more transparent rental process, and hold landlords accountable for their properties. My wife and I have a rental property (outside of Salem) and I support this as someone who is trying to always do right by our own tenants. This kind of system might also help the best landlords benefit from high ratings and could be rewarded for their commitment to offering quality 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?**

I think we can first advocate for more taxation at the state level. Under the Trump tax plan, many of us will see deductions from the increase (reinstatement, more accurately) of the SALT deduction. Massachusetts should be reclaiming that money through higher taxes over the next few years and spending it on our cities and our people. (You can call it the Tax Recuperation Under a Malicious President plan, or TRUMP).

Beyond that, we would have to look at raising our property taxes, preferably on the commercial side. Right now, we are at approximately 2.35% on valuation,

so we have some room (about \$8 million). In order to prevent rising rents on housing, it might be best to raise the commercial rate up, even if it means going over the \$25 per \$1000 in the way Boston does that currently (prop 2 ½ allows for this). There may also be some ability to increase fees on certain businesses, like those that benefit greatly from the tourism industry here in Salem. Perhaps licensing fees for gift shops, in an attempt to have more benefit to the city for what the residents put up with during Halloween and as a deterrent to all of our downtown stores becoming gift shops.

We can also appeal to the voters and do an override. While many overrides are for specific projects, they can also be for general budgetary needs. We will be doing a debt exclusion in the coming years for our high school but, prior to that, we can directly ask our residents if the future of Salem is worth investing in (I believe it is) and then even do a ranked choice on what they would like the money to go to. This would be a good foray into ranked-choice voting, which I also like.

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

More choices of study programs. This can range from vocational training, to bilingual programs, to college prep and even college partnerships to start coursework early. These programs always get rave reviews from parents and others. We also had great success this year in AP programs, so continuing to expand that for top achieving students is important.

We spend a lot on busing right now, if we can optimize those routes and get that down, we can spend more money on student learning. Teacher pay and the amount of free time for prep should go up. Both of these items will help attract excellent teachers and retain the excellent ones we already have. There is also data that larger class sizes (not past 30) can lead to better learning outcomes and would also help facilitate this higher pay and free periods. So, I would advocate for a study looking at that. It just builds in a higher probability that students can learn from one another and see themselves in other kids in the classroom by creating even more diversity, which also facilitates learning.

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

Right now we have a good system. I'm worried to even draw attention to this, but I will say that sanctuary cities who are thumbing their nose at the administration are putting a target on the backs of their most vulnerable

residents (such as Boston). Instead, we behave as a sanctuary city, without the label. We can protect our residents better in this secretive manner, and hopefully we will keep doing that. That said, it is unsafe for anybody to come into our community, guns drawn, wearing a mask. We have to stop and question ICE agents to make sure that they are who they say they are, even if it means they are slowed down enough to get in the way of an arrest...

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?

- a. Ensuring we remain a Climate Leader Community and reinvest the grants that come with that on things that will compound our ability to fight climate change (like updating municipal buildings and schools to be more efficient or increasing our percentage of renewables in our PowerChoice program).
- b. Mandatory composting for businesses and schools, and free composting for residents (Boston does this, we can too).
- c. Park redesigns that don't involve excessive concrete. We've done this once (Charlotte Forten) and are doing it again (Lappin). It creates a heat zone and hurts downtown dwellers, especially families.
- d. A bonus pipe dream: golf carts. Inexpensive, electric, slowish moving (read: safer) methods of transit to build out our Salem Skipper Shuttle system. With insulated siding they can run year-round and can move people around downtown to alleviate traffic and offer more connection opportunities and last mile transit for residents without cars. The Waterfront Hotel has the right idea there.

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?

Read above, plus multi-use building to bring businesses to the neighborhoods where people live, connected bike lanes that don't put cyclists in harm's way of cars, and more shuttle access to get people to larger modes of transit from their homes.

I also think we need to look at reducing cars downtown by approaching it from the driver's perspective; most policy decisions only take into account the biker, the walker, or the public transit user. Instead, we need to focus on moving cars efficiently and effectively in and out of the city to cut down on pollution and road rage, and then find out where and why people drive. We can then redesign transit options for those people. We must approach the conversations from the mindset of those with the behaviors we want to change, not those who are already doing what we want. This is why I don't think asking only walkers and bikers how to cut down on cars makes sense and perhaps yields less effective solutions.

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?**

It's not just about building more, more, more, as that is a solution that favors developers and hurts our residents. Plus, it's not environmentally sustainable. Instead, I would start with an attempt to turn over our under-utilized housing stock. One way is by repurposing older buildings into nice condos and rental units for seniors to free up larger homes for young families (like the Brix and the St James project).

We also need a rental registry where we keep track of how homes are being used. We have one for inspections, but the data for rentals should be more public and allow renters to see market rates, while also what is available in the rental space. This can further assist with determining how many short-term rentals we have that are spiking prices. In Essex County, there actually are enough housing units for what we would require, but we don't use them effectively (we have a 5% vacancy rate). This may be due to vacant units owned speculatively, AirBNBs, or just an absentee landlord letting a property lapse. With a public registry, we can have more transparency and seek out owners that are hoarding housing from our citizens. It also can make properties safer by publishing the results of private inspections.

Finally, I would push for a community land trust where the city can invest in properties that are good for our community and help keep wealth within our city limits.

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

We've hit our number and have surpassed our quota, but we can always do a bit more. I think, however, our focus should be on the quality of housing and not the quantity. This act has been wonderful in some regards, but has also been used by developers to cash in on large buildings and flow wealth and money out of the city or state through rents. We should be relying more on improving our zoning for walkability, green space (instead of parking lots), and businesses that serve our community (like grocery stores and daycares instead of tourist shops). This way, what is built is housing that people actually want, where they want it, and it serves the community, rather than whatever makes a developer the most money. We should also focus on city-controlled rental properties and a community land trust. If a builder can make money off our city, why can't we do it ourselves?

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

He seems to like flattery, so I would tell our dear, beloved, supreme leader, God among men, commander of our armies and hearts, to come see what a real witch hunt looks like... In seriousness, I've covered some of this above, but we're all on the run and it can often feel like there is so little that we can do on a local level to avoid the random wrath of the current Federal government. However, we can be ready for when he is gone and the faucet of federal funds turns back on. We need shovel-ready projects and big ideas for the next big swing left. But, this is not to say that Salem should go easy in the interim. Should we find our ideals and values pressed, we will have to fight with whatever means we have. Like a small and mighty bantam, we punch above our weight and Trump always chickens out.

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

Coffee chats, newsletter, quarterly townhalls are all things I'm committed to offering. I like explaining why I do something, even if people feel it's wrong, and I want to make sure that my constituents know why I made a specific move or cast a specific vote. I am very transparent, open, and honest.

I also want us to make more of the city's data publicly available online so that local experts can weigh in on city issues. We have a lot of very smart people in a variety of spaces who live here and want to be a part of Salem's future. They have amazing ideas, they just need an invitation and access to information to offer their expert advice. One other idea is to use the power of Artificial Intelligence to build a database of city addresses where someone can sign up and receive automatic correspondence when work is being done in their area, or when a street is closed, etc.

Call me at 978-219-6665 or email me at andrewworks4salem@gmail.com anytime and I'm happy to chat.

(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? **YES (we have)**

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 (but I want to mention, this kind of fiscal gymnastics would be so much easier if we just got rid of Prop 2 ½)**
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 (I would be absolutely floored if we ever did this, but would obviously oppose vehemently)**

(D) Additional Comments

Thanks for reading and thanks for your consideration!

- Andrew