



2025 Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Ben Ewen-Campen

Office Sought: Somerville City Council, Ward 3

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(A) Your Candidacy

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

Big picture, my top priorities have always been housing affordability, economic justice (AKA development without displacement AKA community benefits), and street safety. Having accomplished many important priorities over the past four terms, some top priorities I am currently working on: (1) I'm working with the ACLU-MA on strictly limiting police data sharing with the federal government (2) to preserve a long-time affordable artists' studio building in Ward 3, representing the first time we have successfully intervened to create a permanently affordable artists' building and (3) I'm working to implement Somerville's Safe Streets Ordinance (which requires the creation of protected bike lanes, pedestrian infrastructure, and ADA access) as we face increasing financial restraints.

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

I was first elected in 2017, and have helped lead Somerville in passing arguably the most ambitious affordable housing agenda in the State, as well as many progressive priorities from street safety to workers rights. You can read more about what I have accomplished in office here:

<https://www.benforward3.com/accomplishments>.

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

We have taken a great deal of inspiration from progressive neighbors, and one particular policy I'm working on now (the data sharing ordinance mentioned above) is also being pursued by Cambridge and Boston, among other municipalities.

(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?**

Since 2018 I have prioritized the creation of a real estate transfer fee. When we first passed our HRP, it was just two or three communities working independently, but with Somerville's leadership we have built a statewide coalition that has made genuine progress including getting the provision included in the Governor's budget last year.

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

Raising the next generation through strong public schools is quite literally the most foundational responsibility that we have as a society. I have consistently joined in successful advocacy campaigns to ensure that Somerville SPS receives transformational budget increases every year, and I'm glad to say that just this year the Somerville Educator's Union settled a very impressive contract. We have successfully advocated for increased "out of school" time (i.e. before and after school), and have always worked collaboratively with the School Committee to enact the priorities of the public school system. And, needless to say we need to move as fast as humanly possible on the rebuilding of the Winter Hill and Brown Schools.

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

The authoritarian takeover of the Federal government manifests in many ways, and easily the most viscerally horrifying and enraging is the largescale deployment of masked, unidentifiable Federal agents grabbing people off the streets and whisking them into unmarked vans, largely denying them constitutional protections and due process. It is an absolute nightmare scenario to life. Somerville has been working non-stop on know-your-rights campaigns and helping to establish legal support networks and community

support networks, as well as a great deal of work informally and behind the scenes to support our immigrant community.

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?

I led our efforts to become a fossil-free community, meaning that fossil fuel connections are prohibited in new construction (we were unfortunately blocked at the State level - we were the 11th community to qualify for the arbitrary 10-community cutoff). We have made massive investments in stormwater infrastructure to handle increasing storm severity, including probably the biggest residential sewer overhaul right in Ward 3, the Spring Hill Sewer project, and we have also implemented major advancements in our transportation planning and implementation to reduce vehicle dependence. Currently, my top priority is to finally pass our Energy Disclosure & Rental Registry Ordinance, which will bring transparency to energy costs in rental units and thus incentivize landlords to invest in efficient homes. In all of these efforts we work to ensure the effects are equitable and that any costs are not unduly placed on lower- and middle-income residents.

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?

I have consistently been a leader on our City's Vision Zero efforts, our Bike Network Plan, our Safe Streets Ordinance, and our advocacy around bus priority and the new Better Bus Network, all of which are cutting edge efforts to make streets safer for walking, biking, and public transit.

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?

Affordable housing has been my top priority since taking office, and we have passed far too many policies to list - you can view most of them here: <https://www.benforward3.com/accomplishments>

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

I believe that, with the exception of Cambridge's recent citywide upzoning, Somerville is probably the most pro-housing zoning in Massachusetts. There is

always room for improvement, but the changes that we have made beginning with our citywide zoning overhaul in 2019 have been transformational in terms of allowing new housing near transit, and we have built on this success with e.g. legalizing triple-deckers and backyard cottages citywide by right, an Affordable Housing Overlay that I sponsored, removing mandatory parking minimums, etc.

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

My top priority on this right now is working with the ACLU-MA on an Ordinance to restrict data sharing between our police department and the Federal government, which has consistently shown that it is willing to break the law and disregard the constitution in order to use law enforcement to enact their far-right policies. While I do not believe SPD is currently doing so, I will work to make sure and to ensure that SPD will not be involved in any such efforts in the future.

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

Since 2017 I have shared a regular email newsletter that over 1,000 constituents read and regularly provide feedback on. I try to be available and accountable at all times - Ward 3 is a relatively small area, where I live with my family, and I make sure that constituents know that I am available and willing to discuss any issue, any time. For big votes, I always do what I can to explain how I came to my decision, and share these views publicly on social media and in my newsletter.

(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** Yes, already did.

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, helped pass the Safe Streets Ordinance.**
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, done.**
7. Would you support a home rule petition to enable the city to stabilize rents? **YES, I led our efforts to do so.**
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

(Use this space to make any final comments you deem important for progressive voters assessing your candidacy.)