



2025 Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Erin Turowski

Office Sought: Ward 1 City Council, Salem, MA

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(A) Your Candidacy

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

- Promotion of safe, efficient transportation across modes - Promoting safe, efficient transportation options is essential for a more sustainable community. By encouraging residents to walk, use public transit, and embrace micromobility, we can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve public health and wellness.

This shift also has a direct impact on our roadways. By easing non-essential vehicle traffic, we make travel smoother for those who need to drive, while also lowering the long-term maintenance costs of our infrastructure. This effort benefits everyone, creating a more efficient and livable transportation network.

- Mitigating the effects of climate change - We live in an area highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including flooding, erosion, and rising temperatures. The urgency of this issue was made clear in January 2024, when the Willows neighborhood was devastated by a catastrophic flood after two seawalls failed (<https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/north-shore-communities-recovering-after-storm/3246270/>). Beyond this extreme event, much of our ward experiences frequent flooding during high tides and storm surges.

Our urban neighborhoods, like The Point, face an additional threat: the urban heat island effect. This makes these areas significantly hotter:

sometimes 10°F warmer than more suburban, landscaped parts of the city (<https://salemsond.org/extreme-heat/>).

Looking at current flood maps for 2030 and 2050, it is apparent that my neighborhood, The Point/Palmer Cove, is at risk of significant water inundation (https://isv.ayr.mybluehost.me/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Palmer-Cove_MC_FRM.pdf). We must take action now to improve our climate and flood resilience before these threats endanger our lives and property.

- Increasing access to housing - Like many communities across Massachusetts, Salem is grappling with increasingly inaccessible and unaffordable housing, which has led to a growing unhoused population. As a recent renter, I can personally attest to the stress that housing insecurity places on every aspect of a person's life. I am committed to working to reduce this burden for my neighbors wherever I can.

To ensure more affordable and accessible housing in Salem, I would prioritize zoning reforms and policy changes that encourage the development of diverse housing types. This includes supporting the creation of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and modest "middle housing," such as duplexes, triplexes, and quadplexes, which already comprise a significant portion of our city's existing housing stock.

Furthermore, I would advocate for streamlining the permitting process to reduce barriers that slow or prevent new housing production. It is also essential to partner with nonprofit developers and leverage Commonwealth and federal resources to effectively expand our supply of income-restricted housing options.

Salem has already begun the critical work of updating our regulations to facilitate housing growth and reduce the burden on our existing stock. This includes reforms such as removing parking minimums, facilitating ADU construction, expanding inclusionary zoning, and leveraging 40R incentives. I also support our newly adopted condo conversion ordinance for its efforts to limit displacement and financial strain on our significant tenant population - a group that makes up nearly 50% of Salem's residents (https://www.sec.state.ma.us/census2020/img/umdi-fs/Salem_The%20Census%202020%20Low%20Response%20Score.pdf).

I am excited for the progress Salem has already made toward right-sizing our housing supply, and hope I have the opportunity to continue this work in the future as a Councillor.

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

- Small business leadership experience - As a veterinarian with six years of experience in business management, I have a deep appreciation for the challenges of running a small business. Salem's economy thrives on the success of its entrepreneurs, and my professional background gives me unique common ground with the many residents who depend on their businesses to live and work here. As an elected official, I am committed to helping our small business owners succeed.
- Scientific training and work experience - My education and professional background have given me the skills needed to analyze the climate and flood challenges facing Ward 1 and Salem. My bachelor's degree in Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering provides a strong foundation for understanding our environmental issues and developing smart, effective solutions.

Additionally, my fifteen years as a practicing veterinarian have taught me how to work collaboratively with people from all walks of life. This experience has honed my ability to solve complex problems with a focus on data-driven, scientifically validated, and economically responsible outcomes - skills that will be invaluable in public service.

- Proven track record of community service - I've long been dedicated to improving our community. In 2022, I co-founded Salem's Safe Walking Advocacy Group (SWAG), a grassroots effort focused on raising awareness about pedestrian safety. Through SWAG, we've created a welcoming space where residents can collaborate on making our roads safer for everyone.

My commitment to environmental stewardship is equally strong. As a volunteer and SCUBA diver at the New England Aquarium, I am a proud advocate for our marine environment. This work is especially meaningful in a city with such a deep maritime history, and it reinforces my personal mission to preserve our oceans and protect our natural resources for generations to come.

- Strong history of participation in public meetings - I've been an active member of Salem's Transportation Commission for nearly two years, and my commitment is notable: I've only missed two out of twenty-four

meetings in that time. I take the role seriously, consistently reviewing presentations and preparing thoughtful questions beforehand. I also make it a point to share meeting notices, ensuring my friends and neighbors are aware of agenda items that might impact them. This experience, combined with attending many other public meetings, has prepared me for the significant time and dedication required of a City Councillor. I'm ready to work hard and be a truly effective public servant.

- Consistent voting history - Since moving to Salem in 2016, I have been a dedicated participant in our democracy, voting in every general and primary election since 2018. My commitment extends to local races as well; I voted in both the 2021 and 2023 municipal elections and their preliminary races and actively volunteered on several campaigns in the 2023 cycle. I believe in the power of the democratic process and in my civic responsibility to vote. Democracy is not a spectator sport.

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

I would advocate for integrating more greenscaping into our street infrastructure projects. For example, Montreal's guidelines strongly encourage dedicated green space (such as a recommended 1.2-meter "green buffer zone" or "zone de verdissement" alongside bike lanes) to enhance visual appeal, provide climate resilience, and help calm traffic (<https://montreal-amenagement-rues.powerappsportals.com/Composantes/Voie-cyclable/>). This approach, which prioritizes sustainability and functionality, is a model we should follow to make our city's public spaces more resilient and beautiful.

In nearby Quebec City, some zones, including the 22 km "Corridor des Cheminots" bike path, are required to include mature trees, shrubs, and other vegetation in addition to replacing devitalized trees and planting greenery on bare slopes (<https://reglements.ville.quebec.qc.ca/fr/document/ra/R.C.A.2V.Q.%20152>).

We should prioritize integrating sustainable greenscaping, ideally using native plants, along our cycling and shared-use paths. This would not only enhance the visual appeal of our rights-of-way but also provide essential cooling, bolster climate resilience, and act as a natural form of traffic calming. Even where full greenscaping is not feasible, we can use container gardens or planters to bring these benefits to our urban spaces.

Additionally, I support the ongoing city initiative to remove or reduce mandatory parking minimums, an effort that I believe should be expanded citywide. Eliminating these requirements should lower housing construction costs, increase the number of available units, and encourage a more people-centered approach to urban design. By making this change, we can help address Salem's housing affordability challenges and create a more walkable, livable community.

(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?

Salem's tourist industry is a valuable asset, but we aren't maximizing its financial benefits. The city's October 2024 finances show that we incurred over \$640,000 in expenses for a total revenue of just under \$720,000 (<https://salemma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6684/MINUTES---02-27-2025---REGULAR-MEETING>). While local businesses thrive, the city shoulders the cost of increased personnel, infrastructure wear and tear, and sanitation.

We need to capture more revenue from tourism to offset these municipal costs. A key area for improvement is vehicles that bring tourist crowds into Salem. Tour buses, which cause exponentially more road damage than cars due to their massive weight, currently park for free. In at least two recent public meetings, I have heard from tour company operators themselves that they would be willing to pay for bus parking. We should establish designated, paid bus parking areas, preferably away from the downtown area, to reduce downtown congestion and generate revenue. These funds could then be used to cover the costs of roadway maintenance, public safety, and sanitation, both at the satellite parking lots and in the downtown core.

We should also re-evaluate our parking strategy for out-of-town visitors. By raising parking fees and enforcement fines for non-residents, we can both increase revenue and reduce downtown congestion. We can create a fair system by offering subsidies for Salem residents and employees, ensuring they are not negatively impacted. This approach would make it easier for people conducting essential travel to drive and park downtown.

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

The current Salem High School is nearing the end of its useful life, with its maintenance and utility costs becoming increasingly unsustainable. Supporting the construction of a new high school is therefore not just an option, but a necessity. This will require a concerted effort to secure funding, including Commonwealth-level support and a potential Proposition 2.5 property tax override.

Delaying this project would be a costly mistake, risking our eligibility for critical Commonwealth grant money and leading to even higher ongoing maintenance expenses. Providing our students with a modern, functional learning environment is paramount to their educational success and should be our highest priority in supporting public education in Salem.

I also strongly support expanding career and technical education (CTE) curricula, including new programs related to our offshore wind site. The goal is to provide all interested students with the vocational training they need to become productive members of our workforce immediately upon graduation.

From 2019 to 2022, I had the privilege of helping to open and run the veterinary teaching clinic at Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School with the support of MSPCA-Angell. I was deeply impressed by the technical skills and certifications our students earned before even graduating - skills that took me years to acquire in near-minimum-wage jobs during college.

We should encourage students to pursue these real-world occupational skills, allowing them to avoid the burden of student loans and the opportunity cost of post-secondary education when a chosen career path can be learned through a high-quality CTE program.

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

The threat of federal immigration enforcement is a serious concern for our community, as evidenced by a recent sighting on Derby Street. In response, I am actively participating in "Know Your Rights" advocacy training and carrying "red cards" to share. I was heartened to see bilingual "Know Your Rights" literature posted in Mary Jane Lee Park,

and I believe we must expand the availability of these resources, as well as increase the visibility of the LUCE hotline.

To better serve my neighbors, I am personally improving my conversational Spanish. My campaign website has been bilingual since March, making me the only Ward 1 candidate with an English/Spanish site, which reflects my commitment to engaging with all residents, regardless of language.

I commend the Salem Police Department's Community Impact Unit (CIU) for their work in building community trust. Their policy of focusing on local law enforcement helps ensure that residents feel safe approaching them for help, rather than fearing collaboration with ethically questionable federal initiatives.

One of my best friends in Salem is a naturalized citizen from South America, and she has given me a personal understanding of the daily struggles many non-native residents face. I will always advocate for the safety and due process of every person in our community. I am committed to protecting our friends and neighbors, valuing the productive roles they play in our society, and ensuring that everyone feels safe and respected, regardless of where they were born.

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?

As a City Councillor, my focus would be on implementing policies that protect our residents from the effects of climate change. This includes addressing flooding, mitigating rising temperatures, and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, especially in transportation.

The Commonwealth's Environmental Justice (EJ) maps provide a straightforward roadmap for prioritizing our most vulnerable neighborhoods, including my own in Ward 1 (<https://mass-eoeea.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=535e4419dc0545be980545a0eeaf9b53>). By partnering with existing community organizations like Resilient Together, Salem Sound Coastwatch, the city's Sustainability, Energy, and Resiliency Committee, and Salem Alliance for the Environment, we can build a climate resilience framework that is both scientifically sound and socially just. This collaborative approach will ensure our most at-risk residents are at the center of our climate action.

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?

My commitment to sustainable transportation begins with leading by example; I've been car-free for three years. I also co-founded Salem's Safe Walking Advocacy Group (SWAG), which raises awareness about pedestrian safety and hosts group walks to encourage a car-light lifestyle.

As a member of Salem's Transportation Commission, I continually champion pedestrian and cyclist safety in new infrastructure projects. I believe we must better connect our shared-use and cycling routes, both within high-density corridors like Washington Street and on inter-city arteries like Route 114. Creating physically protected bike lanes, organized group rides, and bicycle-sharing programs will help new riders gain confidence, while abundant and secure bike racks will protect cyclists' personal property from theft.

I am also a strong advocate for Commonwealth-level transit improvements. I support the electrification and expansion of our existing MBTA commuter rail, including the proposed South Salem platform. I also support the expansion of our commuter ferry program to offer more frequent service, additional boats, and potentially even new routes to the South Shore and Cape.

By making it easier for residents to travel without a personal vehicle, we can reduce traffic and free up road space for those who truly need it.

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?

-Property tax reductions for qualifying seniors - I support continuing and strengthening programs like the Senior Tax Exemption Program (STEP) and the Council on Aging's Senior Work-Off Program. These initiatives are crucial for helping our seniors relieve their tax burdens, particularly as property values rise.

-Policies to support car-light or car-free living - During a recent canvass, I spoke with an elderly neighbor who was able to sell her car and now relies on walking and the Salem Skipper. This has given her back her independence while freeing her from the financial burden of car ownership, which can exceed \$1,000 per month (<https://www.bts.gov/content/average-cost-owning-and-operating-automobilea-assuming-15000-vehicle-miles-year>).

Making car-free travel easier helps residents of all ages (including children, people with disabilities, and seniors on fixed incomes) save money and enjoy greater freedom of movement. It's a win for our community's finances and quality of life.

-Right-sizing our housing stock to provide options for downsizing - I want to ensure our seniors can not only "age in place," but "age in community." This means creating more housing options that meet their needs later in life, such as single-floor floor plans, lower maintenance requirements, and elevator access. By providing smaller, more affordable homes, especially in transit-oriented areas, we can give seniors who wish to downsize an easier path to do so. This approach would allow them to reduce their costs for rent, mortgages, taxes, and maintenance, all while staying right here in Salem.

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

Salem has been a leader in addressing our housing challenges, becoming one of the first municipalities in Massachusetts to be fully compliant with Section 3A of the Zoning Act (<https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Salem-District-Approval-Letter-9-8-2023-signed.pdf>).

While we met the Commonwealth's requirements by leveraging our existing downtown B5 zoning district, our rising cost of living proves that meeting the minimum is not enough. We must do more to make it easier to build new housing in designated growth areas to effectively address issues of availability and affordability.

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

I believe that every resident should feel safe participating in our civic life, which is why I have consistently advocated for vote-by-mail and absentee voting. This allows people to vote with confidence, regardless of their health or security concerns.

To further protect our community, we must take a proactive approach to potential encounters with federal agents. I would support an initiative to work with businesses, schools, and other public facilities to create concise, pre-emptive policies on how to handle such visits. By partnering with local advocacy groups, we can ensure that employees in high-risk areas, like restaurants, places of worship, and hospitals, are

informed of their rights and equipped to respond appropriately. This is a critical step in building a resilient and secure community for all.

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

My experience as a veterinarian has taught me that the foundation of a healthy community is trust. I've built my career on being transparent and honest, and I will carry these values with me to public service.

If elected, I will make myself as accessible as possible, committing to respond to all constituent inquiries within 24 hours. I have also voluntarily registered with the Office of Campaign and Political Finance to ensure complete transparency in my campaign finances.

To keep everyone informed, I plan to circulate a periodic newsletter with updates on city meetings and events. I will also hold regular office hours, giving residents the chance to meet with me directly. By fostering open communication and active engagement, we can build a more cooperative and satisfied community.

(C) Yes/No Policy Questions

1. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools? YES/ NO

YES. Salem's public schools currently rank among the highest-performing of 26 gateway cities in the Commonwealth (<https://saalemk12.org/news/sps-mcas-accountability-results-2024/>).

Given this record of success, there is no compelling case for expanding our charter school programs. In fact, doing so could divert crucial funding from our public school system at a time when we are considering the significant investment of building a new high school.

This was clearly demonstrated last year when Salem Academy Charter School petitioned to increase its enrollment. Mayor Dominick Pangallo and Superintendent Steve Zrike rightly opposed the request, citing the strong performance of Salem Public Schools and the potential budgetary impact. Ultimately, the Commonwealth's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) commissioner agreed, denying the petition and affirming the city's position (https://www.salemnews.com/news/Education-commissioner-denies-salem-academys-request-to-expand/article_b741f746-f6b3-11ef-97f2-5379bf5de3f8.html). This decision sets a strong precedent that protecting and investing in our public schools is the priority.

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/ NO

In a world with unlimited resources, a separate community response unit could be a valuable asset, helping residents feel more comfortable reaching out for support in sensitive situations. However, given our need for fiscal responsibility, I believe it would be redundant to create a new unit when we already have an exceptional resource in the Salem Police Department's CIU.

The CIU, and even Derby, the Community Resource Dog, have consistently proven to be an invaluable asset in de-escalating emotionally difficult situations and providing support to our unhoused population. Creating a new, separate unit would not provide a significant benefit over the effective work already being done by the CIU. We must be strategic with our budget, and I do not support duplicating services that are already working well.

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/ NO

Salem has already adopted the Specialized Code, which went into effect on 7/1/2024 (<https://www.mass.gov/doc/building-energy-code-adoption-by-municipality/download>).

4. Do you support fare-free public transit? YES / NO

We should absolutely provide subsidized fares for residents in certain categories (low-income earners, students, children, people with disabilities, seniors, etc.). Ultimately, though, at a time when transportation systems across the nation are struggling to find reliable sources of revenue and seeing funding cuts from the federal government, it doesn't seem appropriate to discuss fare-free transit.

More importantly, we should be focused on providing public transit that delivers safe, efficient, frequent, and reliable service using clean and well-maintained conveyances. Prioritizing these aspects will naturally encourage use of public transit by people in the categories mentioned above, as well as by the public at large. Additionally, given the MBTA's current \$700 million budget deficit (<https://mass.streetsblog.org/2024/>

[08/23/a-riders-guide-to-the-mbtas-looming-financial-crisis](#)), we are not in a position to offer free fares without qualification and should make an effort to collect even a nominal fare when possible.

5. Do you support the expansion of the network of permanent, protected bike lanes in your city? YES / NO

YES. Protected bike lanes are a key strategy for encouraging more people to cycle. By providing a safe space for new riders to build confidence, we can increase bicycle utilization across the community. While experienced cyclists also benefit, these lanes are particularly effective at attracting a broader base of users. In the long run, bicycle infrastructure is far more economical to build and maintain than car infrastructure, making expansion of our bike lane network a fiscally responsible way to promote sustainable travel.

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 / NO

YES. Salem has already taken a proactive step by submitting a home rule petition to the Commonwealth to adopt a 2% real estate transfer fee on properties sold for over \$1 million (<https://ma-salem.civicplus.com/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Minutes/01232025-61>). With less than 8% of all property sales and fewer than 3% of primary residences affected, this fee would generate vital revenue for the city's Affordable Housing Trust Fund and only affect a relatively small number of transactions. I fully support this petition and its goal of creating a dedicated, sustainable funding source for affordable housing.

7. Would you support a home rule petition to enable the city to stabilize rents? YES / NO

While I understand the urgency of addressing rising rents, we must be careful to avoid policies with unintended long-term consequences - rent stabilization can disincentivize builders and ultimately limit the construction of new housing, which Salem desperately needs. As the 2024 MassINC Gateway Cities Housing Report highlights, Salem needs to build 2,229 new units over the next decade to stabilize prices (<https://massinc.org/research/2024-gateway-cities-housing-monitor/>).

Our current housing crisis is a direct result of well-intentioned but flawed policies from several decades' worth of prohibitive legislation. Any new policy must strike a critical balance: it must protect current renters without discouraging the new housing construction that is

essential to making our city more affordable for everyone in the long term.

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 / NO**

YES. I believe such efforts would be a blatant overreach and, fortunately, would gain little to no traction here in Salem. Regardless, with the presence of so many Little Free Libraries in our community, it is evident that we value open access to information and cannot (and should not) control the content of every book.

(D) Additional Comments

In May, I was honored to receive a national endorsement from Run For Something, an organization that backs progressive young leaders (<https://directory.runforsomething.net/candidate/bc32f8c6f5a4bd750b1af322e371f009/turowski-erin/>). Their recognition of me as a "Climate Champion" underscores my commitment to creating a more sustainable Salem. I am grateful for their support and would be honored to earn yours at the polls, first on September 16 and again on November 4. I look forward to the opportunity to earn your trust and your vote as we work together to build a brighter future for our community.