



2025 Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

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Office Sought: Councilor-at-Large

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(A) Your Candidacy

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

- 1) Increase Funding for our Schools and New Housing (by growing our business tax base and leveraging grants to the extent possible).
- 2) Reduce our Carbon Footprint, noting imminent deadlines to reduce emissions by half by 2030 where we've fallen behind.
- 3) Hire more public safety responders and reduce our reliance on expensive police overtime. We are short-staffed firefighters, police, and unarmed mental health/substance abuse responders: we not only rely on expensive, mandatory overtime, but we are holding onto staff past their desired retirement age which is unsustainable.

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

I've been re-elected to the Democratic State Committee on the presidential primary ballot, now serving my second term (first in 2020 and now 2024). My political activism electing progressive candidates and championing progressive causes such as the Green Line extension and the Massachusetts Climate Law goes back decades, all on a volunteer basis. I haven't taken a single dollar for my volunteerism, more than demonstrating my commitment to public service. In addition, my professional work as a cancer and vaccine researcher includes business development experience recruiting biotech clients: this experience will come in handy recruiting businesses to Somerville to fill our empty lab and commercial spaces to provide much-needed commercial property tax revenue.

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

There are countless policies we should consider to reduce our carbon emissions: I truly believe we will need an all-of-the-above approach to meet our climate goals. One element that I think is missing in Somerville is dedicating at least some of our City squares on a seasonal basis to pedestrian and bicycle traffic only, similar to Sainte-Catherine Street in Montreal. There have been many discussions about turning Davis Square into a pedestrian space, to the extent traffic can be re-routed: I am open to pedestrian only roadways on weekends, seasonally, and/or year-round circumstances permitting.

(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?

The only way to sustainably increase our tax revenue is by growing our commercial property tax base by bringing new development and new businesses to Somerville. Our City loses money on all types of residential space because of the cost of schools, City services, and housing infrastructure: for that reason, we run annual deficits on order of tens of millions of dollars that are covered by State aid. Increasing our business tax base allows us to sustainably build new housing in parallel, which would include market, affordable, and subsidized housing options.

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

I wrote an entire column about expanding public education to prepare for a green economy (<https://www.thesomervilletimes.com/archives/110488>). We need to provide our schools the funding they need to prepare our students and workforce for the green economy of the future. This means guaranteed placement in our after-school programs for our student population and expanded adult education and training for in-demand job skills after graduation, so everyone has a shot at a job placement. I believe we can achieve greater economic equity through educational excellence: every member of our community deserves access to free, quality, life-long public education and equal employment opportunity.

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

By our US Constitution's anti-commandeering doctrine, we have no responsibility to cooperate with ICE or any federal agency to facilitate these cruel federal actions: we should maintain our sanctuary City status and take swift legal action to ensure everyone detained by ICE gets due process. ICE is known to move detainees out of state to avoid the law, so we must move quickly taking legal action to ensure everyone gets due process. We can also take court action leveraging civil rights law if ICE and other federal agencies are targeting protected classes, which appears to be the case. Educating the public about their rights is also key, so that we respond effectively as a community. We should also continue to leverage pro bono legal services on top of our city budget to help the most people in need of legal defense.

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?

The entire world is falling behind our climate goals: the prospect of lasting damage to our planet and a reduction in the number of areas that can support human life is very real.

The Massachusetts climate Law gives our cities including Somerville the opportunity to lead. This means that Somerville needs to transition to 100% carbon-free, renewable energy (e.g. using clean energy transfer) and that every vehicle and building in the City transition to electric. We need to partner with our local businesses to build electric vehicle charging stations City-wide and require all new buildings and renovations in Somerville be net-zero emissions. We also need to increase open and green space citywide and reclaim valuable street-side space for outdoor commerce and the arts. This would drive our economic growth and create accessible infrastructure to support pedestrians, cyclists, public transit, and parking for those that need it.

We also have a large, State-designated environmental justice community in East Somerville that is eligible for job training, business grants, and financial incentives to facilitate our transition to a green economy: let's leave no money on the table and get everyone the maximum support.

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?

All sidewalks and major intersections should be ADA-accessible including pavers and sonic crossing devices. I also support dedicated bus lanes and electrification of our parking and public transit infrastructure (e.g. consistent with the anticipated roll-out of electric MBTA buses citywide and the need for electric vehicle charging stations).

Our City's well-intended patchwork of bicycle lanes, sometimes protected, sometimes unprotected, sometimes on one side of the street, sometimes on both sides, and sometimes painted down the middle of the road may be confusing to both cyclists and motorists: this may limit their safety benefits and may explain the limited adoption of bicycles as a mode of transportation citywide.

The most successful bicycle infrastructure is the Somerville Community Path which can support a bicycle or pedestrian commute all the way to Cambridge and Boston: we need to prioritize roadway improvements connecting our neighborhoods to the Community Path and monitor their adoption by cyclists seasonally and year-round. To help close the gap between cyclists' homes and the Community Path, we should equip our buses with more bicycle racks to reduce potentially unsafe commutes by bicycle alone. I suspect promoting hybrid bus/bike commutes to work may improve safety.

Our Safe Street Ordinance should be amended to allow for data-based monitoring and re-design of bicycle paths found to be unsafe or largely unused, rather than measuring progress in terms of mileage alone. No one in this City wants to see bicycle-related (or any transit-related) fatalities: City officials should consider the good-faith feedback of the critics of our bicycle lane designs and find new ways to create more uniform bike lane designs and/or hybrid commutes blending bikes and public transit that residents can use safely.

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?

For starters, Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is the best approach to support the most vulnerable individuals and families. The primary obstacle to expanding PSH in Somerville is the fact that Somerville does not have the commercial property tax base that our wealthier neighbors have, e.g. Cambridge. I credit the Somerville Office of Housing Stability for the services they offer to prevent displacement and homelessness, albeit on a smaller scale, and I support generous increases to their budget.

We are also facing major headwinds to building all types of new housing in Somerville (market-rate, affordable, subsidized). In a recent column in the Globe (8/7/2025), Patrick McMahon of Federal Realty described new housing construction in Assembly Square as “not economically feasible” in the current environment citing City, State, and federal policies alongside market forces as the causes. These challenges are compounded by the fact that Somerville loses money on all types of housing due to the costs of infrastructure, Schools, and City services needed to support new housing units: if Somerville *only* builds new housing (without commercial development), Somerville will not be able to pay its bills to support the new units of housing.

The best approach to accelerate new housing construction is to couple it with commercial property tax revenue growth derived from bringing new businesses to Somerville: in this way, we can subsidize new housing construction of all types using commercial property tax revenue and tackle our housing affordability crisis at scale. Part of my plan to bring new businesses to Somerville to fill empty lab spaces etc. and to grow our commercial property tax base is detailed in my Union Square Main Streets questionnaire responses

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/571b9f6401dbae7d74e30916/t/6877b1a1e6fea4728984deb/1752674721330/Justin+Klekota+Candidate+Questionnaire.pdf>.

I also support rent stabilization that would prohibit excessive year-over-year percentage rent increases to help reduce the displacement of residents. Typically, good landlords only modestly increase rent on sitting tenants when renewing their annual leases because this also reduces their property’s vacancy rate which boosts revenue. When I lived with renters in my home, I never increased rent on a sitting tenant.

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

Somerville is already compliant and is going further to increase our housing density in proximity of our MBTA bus and subway transit areas, something I strongly support.

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

We are already litigating against the Trump administration over potential funding loss related to our status as a Sanctuary City. We will continue to fight in the Courts as long as it takes to secure funding to which we are legally entitled.

Sadly, healthcare is also under attack given federal cuts to Medicaid. Cities need to intervene by supporting health screening clinics, vaccination programs, and assistance to help residents maintain their health insurance coverage (so no one loses coverage due to confusing Medicaid paperwork).

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

For starters, Somerville City government needs to be more transparent about its financial situation and communicate to the public: our annual budget deficits (in the absence of State aid), the year-over-year growth in commercial property tax revenue, the year-over-year growth in residential property tax revenue, annual changes in the number of housing units, and annual increases in our City spending. The goal of Cities is to provide for the needs of its residents and maintain high standards of livability and affordability. To this end, helping residents understand our financial situation including both highlights (favorable bond rating to borrow money) and challenges (deficits and commercial property tax revenue) can allow us to plot a way forward together.

With a clear understanding of our financial situation, we can measure our progress delivering on our progressive spending priorities and be accountable to how City funds are ultimately spent alongside other key metrics like new housing units (affordable, subsidized, market, etc.).

(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**

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 have a twenty-five year record of volunteerism where I always put others first, lifting up progressive candidates and progressive causes. We often see candidates run for office who have never volunteered for other campaigns before, but expect progressive support based on ideology alone. I believe we need leaders who put progressive values into action: by that standard, my record and experience set me apart. Thanks for your consideration, and I humbly ask for your vote Tuesday September 16 and November 4. To learn more, visit electjustin.org!