



## 2025 Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Michael “Mike” Morales

Office Sought: Haverhill City Councilor At-Large

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### **(A) Your Candidacy**

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

1. Smart, equitable, and affordable housing policies
2. Smarter tax policies without unnecessary increases
3. Stronger and more sustainable city services and infrastructure

#### **2. What qualifies you to hold this office?**

I feel that I bring strong leadership and community engagement experience, as evidenced by my service on the Haverhill Planning Board, Community Action Inc., Haverhill Cultural Council, and other local organizations. My background as a criminal defense social worker and mitigation specialist, combined with my real estate expertise equips me with a comprehensive understanding of policies, regulations, and residents' rights. Committed to transparency and collaboration, I effectively engage with diverse stakeholders to advance shared goals. With a steadfast focus on critical issues such as affordable housing, senior services, mental health, and public safety, I am dedicated to developing practical solutions that enhance the quality of life for all residents.

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

The City of Lowell serves as a strong example of a community that faced challenges but successfully transformed itself by leveraging new opportunities and expanding recreational offerings for its residents. During the 1990s and early 2000s, Lowell capitalized on the significant growth of UMass Lowell, while Middlesex Community College simultaneously secured increased funding and resources to remain competitive. The arrival of the National Park Service further boosted the city by promoting its rich history, tourism, and family-friendly events, which helped attract a more diverse and skilled workforce. While Haverhill has made important progress in enhancing tourism, it is equally crucial to focus on attracting new industries and businesses. Doing so will not only draw a diverse and skilled workforce but also expand the city's tax base, supporting continued growth and development.

## **(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?**

Haverhill recently experienced one of its largest residential tax increases in years, yet we continue to struggle with attracting industrial and commercial development beyond the downtown area. While revitalizing downtown has been important and necessary, other parts of the city have seen little progress. To grow our tax base without placing additional burdens on residents, we must prioritize attracting industrial employers who will not only contribute to city revenues but also support local businesses by bringing a larger workforce into the area. Additionally, we must work with builders to encourage the development of condominiums rather than solely focusing on rental apartments. Condos offer first-time buyers a pathway to homeownership and wealth-building, while also providing seniors with more manageable, downsized living options. All of which contribute to a stronger, more balanced tax base.

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

Maintaining a positive and collaborative relationship with the school committee, school administration, and parents is essential to ensure that all voices are heard and that concerns and ideas are addressed constructively. Many of Haverhill's public schools are in urgent need of repair, maintenance, or full replacement.

In 2023, I proudly supported the “Yes for Consentino” campaign, which helped secure a debt exclusion vote to fund the construction of a new Consentino Middle School. The next major challenge will be addressing the future of the J.G. Whittier School. Given that another debt exclusion for this project is unlikely, we must begin thoughtful and ongoing conversations about alternative funding strategies and long-term planning to ensure our students have access to safe, modern learning environments.

In terms of academic policy, I support a ban on cell phones in classrooms. Teachers across the country are seeing firsthand how cell phone use is contributing to shorter attention spans and reduced engagement. If we want to improve academic outcomes and foster stronger learning environments, we must eliminate this growing distraction during instructional time.

I also support replacing the current seven-period schedule at the high school level with a block schedule. A block schedule would give students more time to dive deeper into course material, reduce daily transitions that eat into learning time, and ease the pressure of juggling seven classes every day. This change would also benefit teachers by allowing for more meaningful instruction and student interaction in each class period.

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

Unfortunately, I do not feel that many municipalities have any authority to engage or prevent any ICE activity. That said, however, I met with Haverhill Chief Pistone in March to discuss how his department is dealing with all of the more recent ICE enforcements and arrests of our neighbors. He expressively cited *Lunn v. Commonwealth* which prohibits local police solely based on an immigration detainer. He said that he and his fellow officers do not want citizens to feel scared from calling for police assistance if and when they need it, and that a person’s immigration status is not taken into account. Community partnerships like this are essential to ensure that both police departments and residents do not have an acrimonious relationship.

**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?**

1) Tree canopy expansion and urban heat island reduction: Use zoning to require shade structures or trees in parking lots and new developments. Prioritize planting in neighborhoods with high heat vulnerability, fewer green spaces, and high percentages of seniors and/or disabled residents.

2) Expand MEVA bus routes and improve frequency, especially in underserved areas.

3) Launch or expand city-wide energy efficiency retrofit program targeting older homes and adopt stricter energy codes for new construction and major renovations. We can help do this by partnering with local organizations such as Community Action, Inc. to help identify eligible residents and ensure language access during outreach.

**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?**

Like many cities and towns in New England, the City of Haverhill is not among the most pedestrian-friendly communities in the Greater Merrimack Valley. While it is important to promote walkability and bicycle accessibility, implementing dedicated bike lanes in certain areas may prove challenging due to traffic volume and limited roadway space.

Strengthening relationships with regional public transportation providers, such as the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MEVA), which offers fare-free bus service, is a positive step. However, more can be done to improve accessibility and efficiency. This includes establishing clearly designated bus stops and enhancing route scheduling to better serve neighborhoods, particularly those not located along major thoroughfares.

Additionally, expanding public transit options for seniors, especially in residential areas that currently lack convenient access, should be a priority. The city's most recent master plan introduced the concept of developing neighborhood "villages," a strategy that holds promise. By decentralizing essential services and amenities, we can reduce the need for frequent travel to high-traffic commercial areas, easing congestion and improving quality of life for residents throughout the city.

**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?**

We must continue working with non-profit organizations and developers, issuing RFPs when appropriate, to ensure that housing production meets both affordability standards and community demand. This year, Haverhill saw its largest tax increase in decades. To avoid placing the full burden on our residents, we must explore strategies that create a more equitable balance between residential needs and industrial growth. We also cannot shy away from addressing zoning reform to remove barriers that prevent the development of affordable housing. Without these changes, developers are often left with no option but to build larger, high-cost homes that are out of reach for many in our community.

Additionally, we must do more to promote the recently passed “Good Landlord Tax Credit” program from the Massachusetts Legislature, which offers property tax exemptions to landlords who rent their units at affordable rates. Supporting and expanding awareness of this program can be a practical step toward stabilizing rents and encouraging more affordable housing options across Haverhill.

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

Haverhill has been a leader in working toward compliance with the MBTA Communities Act. Between 2018 and 2023, the city completed construction on more than 400 new housing units, including over 100 designated as affordable. In 2023, we also updated our Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance, proactively revising it even before the state legislature passed its new ADU law.

As a current member of the Planning Board, I can confidently say that housing production in Haverhill has slowed significantly. This is deeply concerning, especially considering that while the city has committed to establishing an Affordable Housing Trust, it has yet to be activated simply because there’s nothing in the development pipeline.

Without renewed efforts to boost housing production, Haverhill risks losing its eligibility for the Housing Choice Community designation, a valuable opportunity that could open the door to critical grant funding for local infrastructure and development. To keep pace with demand and maintain compliance with the state’s 40B requirement of at least 10% affordable housing, the city must produce subsidized housing equal to 0.5% of its total housing stock each year.

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

Unfortunately, at the municipal level, our ability to push back against administrative overreach is limited. However, it is essential that local governments maintain strong, collaborative relationships with our state and federal delegation. As elected officials, we must work together in a constructive and respectful manner to ensure we are advancing the best interests of our community.

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

There are several ways I hope and intend to model transparency and accountability. First and foremost, regular and ongoing communication with constituents is essential. This includes hosting town halls and listening sessions that give residents consistent opportunities to ask questions, voice concerns, and engage directly with their local government.

Maintaining an active online presence is equally important. Through newsletters, social media, and official websites, we can share timely updates, explain decisions, and provide the reasoning behind key votes or actions. We also have a responsibility to make this information accessible by offering important updates in the multiple languages spoken throughout our community.

While public accountability is crucial, elected officials must also hold themselves accountable. That means being honest about mistakes or missteps, taking responsibility, and clearly communicating the steps being taken to address and correct them. Transparency isn't just a principle—it's a practice that builds trust and strengthens democracy.

#### (C) **Yes/No Policy Questions**

1. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools? **YES/ NO**
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**
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**
4. Do you support fare-free public transit? **YES / NO**
5. Do you support the expansion of the network of permanent, protected bike lanes in your city? **YES / NO**
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**

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

**(D) Additional Comments**

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

While the goal of funding affordable housing is important, I oppose a home rule petition to impose a transfer fee on high-end real estate transactions. A transfer tax is particularly concerning in a city like Haverhill, where the real estate market is still developing and where "high-end" home prices often do not reflect the luxury market seen in larger cities. This type of fee could unintentionally slow the market, discourage investment, and eventually impact middle-class homeowners as property values rise. It also relies on an unpredictable revenue stream that can't support long-term planning. Instead, I feel that we should focus on more stable, effective solutions such as zoning reform, public-private partnerships, and state-supported programs such as the Good Landlord Tax Credit to address housing needs without creating new financial barriers for property owners.