



2025 Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

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(A) Your Candidacy

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

1. Structural reforms on the City Council. We need everything from better transparency for citizens, to major reforms to our antiquated financial-management system, to a full review of our basic processes for issuing special permits. Despite being a progressive-leaning city overall, our Council has been dominated for many years by a conservative voting bloc that has managed to entrench a rule requiring a supermajority vote for any ordinance change. Right now that bloc is attempting to write their supermajority rule into our charter, via home rule petition to avoid bringing it to the public for a vote. As of now we need to elect a supermajority in the incoming council just to return to majority rule, even if we stop this charter change. And that's just the beginning of the work that needs doing.

2. Protecting our community from ICE, and from invasion by federal officers generally, as best we can. This is an ongoing emergency everywhere in the country, but Holyoke is a majority-minority community. It's also the largest Boricua community outside of Puerto Rico itself. We're looking at an elevated and unusual risk profile here, especially in light of the Supreme Court's green light for ICE to rely on racial and linguistic profiling in its sweeps.

This is a tough set of issues to deal with given federal authority. A lot of the work has to be done at the state level, and I'm sure that teams of lawyers and legislators are working through what options we might have to protect our

people. I would hope that we're looking at things like California's new legislation to ban the wearing of masks, and to insist that federal officers be required to identify themselves sufficiently that they remain accountable under the law, and that ordinary criminals can't easily impersonate them (which creates a risk to our local public safety officers as well as to the general public). And we can continue to protect our local police from the moral injury of being forced to cooperate with ICE beyond the barest minimum arguably required by federal law.

This is a particularly urgent issue in Holyoke at the moment, since two sitting Council members are sponsoring a resolution that essentially invites ICE in, and it's attracted support from at least two others. If their faction regains control of the Council in November, this is going to go forward.

3. Infrastructure issues. We've been prevented from doing a lot of basic maintenance over the last few decades, and we need to start fixing things like our sewer lines instead of just running from emergency to emergency.

As part of that, it's past time we built out fiber to the home. Our MLP already has a fiber optic system, but hasn't been willing to do the admittedly expensive buildout, citing concerns about imposing the costs on ratepayers. But especially as the federal government refuses to regulate the big private providers, we need a provider that will offer network neutrality and lack of surveillance – and even if those weren't increasingly critical issues, every community in the state needs first-world infrastructure. Xfinity et al. no longer really provide that.

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

I'm a lawyer (licensed in NY; my law degree is from University of Chicago, so that my legal education had a certain focus on public policy); I've served on the Holyoke Planning Board for 15 years and am currently its chair; I've just finished work on an advisory committee to the mayor and DPW on issues related to the expiration of the city's previous long-term wastewater treatment plant contract; I, along with my board, are now concluding the first Comprehensive Plan Holyoke has done since 1999.

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

Paris's various place-making policies, starting with its move away from encouraging (or tolerating) cars as a primary means of transportation. It

seems to have been done there with full consultation with the public, and the transformation in the city center is extraordinary.

Holyoke's physical footprint is obviously much smaller, but it's very like the layout of an old European city, with an urban core set into a bend in the Connecticut River. We have canals, and some beautiful old buildings; we could add little parks and protected bike-pedestrian streets and run free transit within the downtown area.

In its strong form this is arguably utopian: it would require brownfields cleanup, which costs money we don't have, and we'd need to be careful about making sure that gentrification didn't force people out. But it can be done incrementally, and it was utopian and un-doable in Paris, too, until they did it.

Short of that? Municipal broadband, as discussed above. We should have pioneered it here.

(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?

A. Holyoke is looking at ways to monetize some key functions and services. For example, our wastewater treatment facility, which has more capacity than we need and is accessible by local rail. There are technical advances on the near horizon that could permit us to both raise revenue and save other communities money by sending sludge here for treatment that actually destroys PFAS, as opposed to shipping it across the country and making it our heartland's problem. We can bill for the service; other communities don't have the expense of building their own facilities; it's a win-win.

B. Holyoke is attracting some innovative startups, and we're doing what we can to attract more. In addition to conventional strategies for helping these businesses, it might be worth considering whether we as a city can take small stakes in them in exchange for our investments, as opposed to only offering small low-cost loans and/or tax incentives.

The obvious problem with looking at strategies like this, though, is that the initial investment in time and expertise to explore the legal possibilities, and to develop the capacity to evaluate opportunities isn't trivial. That said, the rewards are potentially high, and not just in terms of direct revenue.

Successful businesses that remain committed to their communities can have a huge impact on the wellbeing of their cities over time, and there's no obvious reason why such a business has to be entirely privately owned.

In the immediate term, though, realistically it's back to grantwriting, with restricted opportunities in our current environment, and lobbying the Commonwealth for a more equitable share of state revenue.

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

Our city council has no real authority over our schools, and I admit to having no useful expertise to contribute. We've already achieved what has been our city's key priority here, which was to get Holyoke's schools out from under receivership and back under local control.

That's happening this year, and my own top priority is listening to our teachers and parents about what they need, and giving them the support they tell us they need. That, and continuing the statewide efforts to make students' futures less dependent on standardized tests like MCAS.

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

See my answer to the first question. As discussed there, job number one in Holyoke at the moment is not inviting ICE in.

Beyond that, we can continue to do as we've been doing: declining to cooperate with ICE on matters like immigration detainers and making it clear that we will not be cooperating with them if they try to conduct raids here. We can (and I expect will) share information about immigration authorities' activities here with the community as soon as we have it.

We could also be advocating more strongly for state-wide legislation that would do more to protect our local police from attempts at cooption from Homeland Security or ICE, thinking about what we can do to strengthen our state's ability to maintain control of our Guard, or to control any other military or quasi-military forces sent here; we could adopt California's new legislation prohibiting police/law enforcement from routine use of face masks.

And we can continue to do all we can to support and protect the many private groups working on mutual aid, and on legal assistance, and on warning networks.

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. Continue to support electrification, and fight back against efforts by local conservatives to try to build out pipelines and go back to a greater reliance on fossil fuels. Holyoke has its own hydroelectric dam, and significant solar facilities, and we're building out battery storage capacity.

It's a real success story: we're already getting a huge amount of our power from renewables, but we have local interests who're still trying to force us to greenlight more natural gas infrastructure.

2. Preserve our existing greenfields and agricultural land, and support green space, from pollinator gardens to urban forests, everywhere in the city. Our downtown is a serious heat island, and it neither should be nor has to be.

3. Keep data centers out of the city. We can't afford them on any level: not the heat, not the water use, not the drain on our electrical supply. Right now we still have unusually low power costs to our residents, which is critical to affordability in a community as poor as Holyoke; data centers and the costs they impose would be a hardship here as well as an environmental menace.

We're working on zoning to keep them out now, and I want to get that in place as soon as we can manage it.

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?

Our downtown is small enough that it could be very walkable. To make it happen we need better, urban-style public transit downtown, ideally free to ride within the center, with connections to both (better/more frequent) public transit outside that center and to parking garages so that people who needed cars would be able to keep them while still letting us reduce the space we devote to parking now.

This would allow us to transition to a pedestrian-oriented downtown, and take better advantage of potential amenities like our canals, and reduce heat-island effects from all that asphalt.

We also already have some e-bike infrastructure in place, and could build that out to allow for non-automobile transit within the wider city.

But to make this work we need to do something about our very real public-safety problem downtown. We need people to feel safe in the streets, and we need people to be able to let their kids ride bikes downtown without assuming they're going to be stolen the instant they get off of them. A broader issue, but we need to address it if we're going to have non-motorized transit here.

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 can try; I only wish this were something we or any city can guarantee.

Housing is key; we're doing what we can to build more. We don't have a lot of greenfields that are appropriate for more housing, but we should be, and are, pursuing infill strategies from ADUs to conversion of old mills to bring more housing on line, and to ensure that there's a broad variety of housing being developed, to address more than one kind of need.

I would also encourage us to explore multiple models for housing. For example, the Mitchell-Lama model in New York was very successful in developing desirable housing for a variety of needs, and maintaining its affordability over time, but the co-op model isn't widely used in Massachusetts. New York is looking at legislation that would revise and update it, and it may be time for us to do it too.

We also need to keep our existing housing available, and affordable for people who want to live here. We're already working to restrict conversion of long-term housing to short-term rentals, and of locally-owned properties to investment properties.

Housing is only one piece of the issue, though. To remain affordable we also need to support services that help people remain in their homes, at one end of life, and we need to support childcare services, so that living here is affordable for young families. We know that these tools don't only help keep the city affordable for its residents: they're also much less expensive for both

families and the public than services delivered in institutional settings, away from people's existing social networks.

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

We're not an MBTA community.

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

Do not comply in advance. Do not signal compliance in advance.

This is a moving target, practically and legally. We need to be in close touch with the AG's office and all the people working on legal strategies at the state level, and we're going to have to be ready to follow emergency plans and ready to improvise when bad things happen that nobody had anticipated. To the extent we can be aware of, and in conversation with, everyone who's developing strategic and tactical responses to potential federal actions, we need to be.

I wish I had a better answer, but we're in uncharted waters here.

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

The same way I have as a planning board member. Answer the public's questions and make any information available that can be made available; do what I can to explain how any government process works; explain why I can't offer information when I can't do it; all that earnest good-government stuff. I assume the part about not taking money or favors from anyone goes without saying.

Beyond that, though, one of my priorities is to reform our city offices so as to improve transparency. Holyoke is often opaque to navigate, and it isn't because anyone is trying to evade public scrutiny. It's because our systems are set up in ways that are less than obvious, and there are often no clear lines of communication anywhere. I've watched failures of transparency over the past few years that didn't need to be failures, and helped guide people through situations where everyone had been trying their best to help answer their questions and produce the needed information. It shouldn't be like this; it

needs to be fixed; and simple changes to our internal systems would go a long way toward taking care of it.

(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 - but it's complicated. For it to work here might require state financial support, at least initially, to help with any legitimate costs above those of building under the conventional code. That's a hypothetical, but we have real problems with rehabbing existing structures based on requirements that once a certain threshold is hit, an entire structure has to be brought up to code all at once. There are fixes for this, but getting them enacted is another question.**
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 - Though to be clear, I doubt this would raise much money in Holyoke: our home values overall are too low. Also we're dealing with a very organized anti-tax faction here: a year ago it succeeded in getting our CPA levy reduced from 1.5% to 1%, despite a clear showing that it would save the average homeowner something like \$12 a year, while costing the city much more in matching grants attracted by CPA funding.**
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**

(D) Additional Comments

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

I apologize for my fail on so many of the yes-or-no questions. The problem is that I find a number of them too complicated, and too dependent on unknown or unknowable specifics, to give accurate yes-or-no answers to.

1, 2, 4, 5, and 8 are easy yes or noes, and I've answered them accordingly. But 3, 6, and 7 are all complicated questions, some for specifically local reasons, and some (like 7) because rent stabilization is both important and difficult, and you really need to see the details and look at your specific circumstances before you can say yes or no to it. And I don't want to promise something in theory that I might find myself opposing in some specific iteration, for reasons that might not even be knowable as I fill out this questionnaire.

So for 3 and 6 I've added notes. I've left 7 blank, because it calls for an entire essay.