

# 2023 Salem City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Progressive Salem

Name: Patti Morsillo

Office Sought: Ward 3 City Councilor

Website: pattiforsalem.com

Facebook: PattiForSalem

Twitter: refuse to participate

Instagram: pattiforsalem

## PUBLIC SECTION

*The public part of the questionnaire contains a mix of yes/no and open-ended questions. Please keep all answers to open-ended questions to no more than 150 words. A non-response to a yes/no question will be treated as a no.*

### (A) Your Candidacy

1. What would be your top three priorities if elected to serve?
  - Constituent Services, Responsiveness, and Engagement
  - Pedestrian and Cyclist safety measures
  - Affordable Housing at all levels
2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

Qualifications to run for/hold this office: the candidate is a registered voter, living in the Ward.

What **drives** me to run for office is my desire to help my constituents to navigate the many departments and complexities involved in getting something done. What **drives** me is the desire to make a difference in the lives of my constituents, by helping them with their problems, and by taking on the issues that will make a difference in the lives of all residents in Salem. I am not afraid to dig in, do the research, look at the data, and figure out the best path forward.

3. What do you see as the role of the City Council in Salem?

The role of the City Council is set by City Charter.

- The City Council appropriates the funds necessary to run the City. The Council can approve or disapprove or decrease the budget only.
- The City Council confirms appointments made by the Mayor.
- The City Council amends the city ordinances and regulations.
- The City Council acts on orders recommended by the Mayor and petitions from the public.

Some Councilors simply attend meetings and never work on policy or ordinance changes outside of a committee meeting. I see my role as a bit larger. I put constituent services first, advocating for changes that will positively affect my Ward. I also dig into the work of policy, which requires research, communication, the willingness to work with city staff, and time.

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

Although it seems minor, banning "nip" bottles is something I would like to see happen in Salem. This can be done through an ordinance or through the Licensing Board. Why? Nip bottles do not have a deposit, and the State Legislature is unwilling to pass a law to include a deposit. Because of that, nip bottles litter the landscape of Salem. We find them everywhere! Since the State legislature is unwilling to take action, the city of Salem should. Right now, there are at least 7 communities that have banned these small bottles, because of the trash.

5. What does community service mean to you?

Community service means doing something positive for someone or for a group of people without the intention of personal reward or money.

In many ways, although a City Councilor is paid, this really is community service. We each receive \$15,000 per year, or 10% of the Mayor's salary, but the work takes up much of my time. Simply producing my weekly newsletter takes at least six hours each week. But I do the work because I know I am making a difference – the salary is incidental. Every time I am able to help a constituent with a problem that has been vexing them, I feel elated. Community service should leave you feeling like you have done a good thing and made a difference in someone's life.

## **(B) Civil Rights & Community Engagement**

1. Name an accomplishment you're particularly proud of that helped to achieve and advance racial justice or equity.

I am proud to have voted for a budget which added the position of a DEI director for the City. We all need to be open to understanding how our habits and work customs may affect our working relationships and our customer service. I am also proud to have led the Council discussion on the creation of the new Race Equity Commission. The commission will be developing and advocating for programs, education, and policies to reduce racism and bias in Salem.

2. What steps would you take, if elected, to engage all the diverse communities of Salem in policymaking, and what past actions of yours should give voters confidence that you will follow through?

From the day I began as a City Councilor, I committed to writing a weekly newsletter, that now goes to a mailing list of 500 subscribers and is shared on social media. I discuss issues before the Council, upcoming meetings, community input meetings, and other events. I encourage my constituents to get involved in matters that directly affect them especially, and I ask for their feedback on issues. Some of the meetings that I have been involved with, and which I have urged residents to attend and participate are the Highland Avenue Vision Plan, the Wetlands public meetings, the Housing Production Plan meetings, and neighborhood meetings about Salem Heights construction, Tropical Products construction, the Lifebridge meeting held by the developers, and the Police Department's meeting about homelessness, just to name a few.

Bringing issues right to the residents to discuss, through neighborhood meetings, especially items like traffic calming and development that happens within a neighborhood, is something I have always planned for and encouraged residents to attend. Neighborhood engagement helps to work out issues before they are a problem, and builds better projects. Always.

3. The future of democracy depends on robust youth engagement. Describe how you engage youth formally in your work as city councilor, or would plan to do so if elected.

Since I was involved in founding the League of Women Voters in 2017, I have been focused on engaging high school students in civic engagement. Working with the high school to set up voter registration drives, and working with Salem State on getting voters to the polls, younger voters have always

been in the forefront of my mind. During the pandemic, when polling locations were condensed, I took the lead on setting up a voter bus to bring residents from different locations in the City to their polling location. We focused on Salem State students as one of several priorities, to make sure they got to their new polling location at Salem High School.

I continue to reach out to all constituents, regardless of age, to make sure they are signed up for my newsletter in order to stay on top of opportunities to get involved. I also encourage younger residents to get involved in our city's boards and commissions, to utilize their talents for the betterment of Salem.

4. What do you think it means to be an ally of the LGBTQ+ community?

Being an ally means to be there to support, listen and learn. I am not someone who will draw attention away from where the spotlight should be focused. I pause and listen to those in the community who are feeling pain, fear or anxiety, or feeling unheard. I use my voice to support them, to uplift them, to work on change that they are asking for.

I am proud to support the LGBTQ+ community, to advocate for the change that is needed, and to work on any ordinances or policies that will aid the community.

5. If a resolution had come before the council to support access to driver's licenses and extending in-state tuition rates & aid to undocumented residents how would you have voted and why?

I would have voted to support both of these policies.

- Drivers licenses should not be something held only by residents. Without a drivers license, and the required insurance, every other person is put in danger. The right to drive legally should never be linked to immigration status, but only your knowledge of the rules of the road and your ability to drive safely.
- Young people brought here by their parents, through no fault or decision of their own are peers with our children, are neighbors and add value to our community, and will continue to do so. Many hold jobs in our community. They deserve an education that is affordable and attainable. Educating any person should always be a priority and a value-add to society.

## **(C) Budget & Revenue**

1. What opportunities do you see for the city to raise revenue?

The new offshore wind marshalling field will bring an increase in property taxes after the first few years, but it will also create new supporting businesses in Salem, which will also increase our tax base. In addition, new housing developments are changing unused or underused property, at a lower property tax amount, to higher taxable land.

Fees charged by the City must be representative of the cost of issuing a permit and enforcing the law, and no more. Raising fees is not appropriate when thinking about raising revenue. Raising revenue is primarily done through property taxes.

The outlier is public, state, or federal owned property or property owned by non-profits, like Salem State University or Salem Hospital. In these cases, the city negotiates a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT). The South Essex Sewerage District (SESD) is a property that has been paying the same PILOT for 30 years. When voted on by the State Legislature, a set amount of \$500,000 was written, with no escalator for the increase in property value. Imagine paying the same property tax today as you did in 1993! I am advocating for the State Legislature to adopt an amendment to the law to raise the PILOT for the SESD (paid by the member communities – Peabody, Danvers, Beverly, and Marblehead) to \$1,000,000 over 5 years, and include a very small escalator to take property value increases into consideration. Although this change results in a miniscule increase for each member community's rate payer (less than \$1 per billing cycle), the State Legislature has not moved on it. Meanwhile, the SESD sits on beautiful coastal property in Salem, while the other communities do not utilize their coastal property (the most valuable) for any regional utility services. If we could get the legislation passed, our SESD rates would be positively impacted, an important win for Salem residents.

## **(D) Education**

*These questions are not appropriate for a City Council candidate. We do not make decisions about school priorities, goals, curriculum, or even budget line items.*

1. What are your top priorities for reducing persistent racial and economic achievement gaps in the Salem Public Schools?
2. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools in Salem? **YES/ NO**

3. What steps would you take to raise the school rating for the Salem Public School System as a whole?

### **(E) Public Safety**

1. Would you advocate for the reallocation of money from the Salem Police Department budget to be reinvested in communities? **YES/ NO**
  - a. **If Yes, how would you “refund” the police and reallocate resources?**

I am supportive of the police department staffing numbers at the currently budgeted levels, which includes two social workers. I would advocate for more social workers to work within the department, but primarily, with the Community Impact Unit.

We need officers in the community, enforcing traffic laws especially, but also addressing serious crime. With the State Legislature’s unwillingness to help municipalities by passing a law to allow video enforcement of traffic infractions, we need to advocate for those who are on patrol to enforce the law. I don’t know how we can get to safer streets and sidewalks for pedestrians and cyclists and other drivers without this.

2. Do you support the legalization of overdose prevention centers? **YES**
3. What steps would you take to address homelessness in Salem?

Homelessness is something that will take more than a paragraph or two to address. First, we need housing! Not only in Salem but everywhere! We need to create supportive housing for those transitioning out of homelessness, like the Harborlight Homes properties on Boston Street. The residents of those homes live in small units and receive services to help them with education, work skills, and living skills.

Second, we need greater access to affordable, quality healthcare and mental healthcare. We need to understand why some people refuse housing and we need to help people address their harmful dependencies.

Third, we all need to advocate for federal and state funds to help get the homeless housed and to get the services needed. We need more Affordable housing that really works as a safety net. But Salem can’t pay for the cost of new housing and mental health services alone at the scale needed.

4. What steps can the city take to address pedestrian safety?

I have asked for data to begin the discussion on removing right-on-red for some intersections, especially in the downtown. Too many times, I have found myself crossing in a crosswalk, with a pedestrian signal, and a car takes a right-on-red, without seeing me. Drivers are so interested in getting through the intersection that they do not come to a full stop, which is required by law, and are looking to the left for oncoming traffic, completely unaware of pedestrians. In the downtown, where pedestrians are common throughout the year, we must make crosswalks safer.

Also, improving visibility at intersections for both pedestrians and drivers will create safer spaces. Enforcing the law that states that cars can not park within 20 feet of an intersection provides the visibility. Unfortunately, we have little parking enforcement and drivers have forgotten many of the laws regarding parking close to driveways, intersections and crosswalks. The police department needs to better enforce the law for pedestrian safety.

I also think that city leaders, including the police and fire departments need to use their platforms to help residents understand how bad decisions lead to injury and death. Drivers who are using a hand held phone or who jump red lights, or follow other cars through red lights, are making bad decisions and are causing crashes and are putting pedestrians and cyclists in harm's way.

5. (Did you) Would you have voted in favor of the sanctuary for peace ordinance?

YES

**(F) Environment & Transportation**

1. What steps would you take to reduce dependence on cars and better facilitate the ability of Salemites to get around by walking, biking, or using public transit?

- Make crosswalks safer by removing some right-on-red, especially in the downtown areas that see more pedestrian activity.
- Push the construction of the new South Salem MBTA station, which will not only serve a very large residential area within walking distance, but will also provide a pedestrian connection between Jefferson Ave and Canal Street.
- Advocate for an express bus from Salem to Wonderland, reducing car trips on Highland Ave and route 1A.

- Expand the Salem Skipper to get to neighboring communities, especially the medical facilities in Danvers and Peabody.
- Advocate for State passage of a bill to allow video enforcement of traffic violations, allowing Salem to install cameras to detect cars going through red lights and those that are speeding. This will make pedestrians and cyclists safer, especially at intersections. Until more people feel safe walking or cycling, cars will continue to clog our streets.

2. What are your plans long term to address the city's aging water pipe infrastructure?

The City has invested in a detailed study of the water and sewer infrastructure and the cost of several projects that will upgrade water, sewer, and stormwater management. These projects have been included in a water and sewer budget that spans several years, allowing the City to plan for and manage water and sewer rates.

The City does a good job of tracking water pipe breaks and either replacing sections or lining the pipe, as was done in an 800 foot section of a water main on Highland Avenue. The cost of replacing water and sewer pipes is exorbitant, which is why focusing on the areas that are known to be weak is the best way to manage the finances.

3. What are your top three policy priorities for making Salem a climate-resilient city, and how would you ensure that equity is at the center of any such efforts?

The City Council will soon be receiving an updated Flood Hazard Overlay District (FHOD) ordinance and a new Climate Resiliency Overlay District (C-ROD) ordinance. I have been a member of the working group crafting these changes for over a year. These are the obvious next steps after passing the updates to our Wetlands Protection ordinance in late 2021. The C-ROD will utilize the 2070 FEMA Flood Maps to provide guidance to residential and commercial property owners in making their buildings more resilient when building new or doing major renovations.

Rebuilding/enforcing our seawalls is also important for coastal property. The city has received grant money and has made investments to do this, though the high cost has set the pace of the work.

An ordinance to require all new construction to use renewable energy, and build using the latest advances in green technology is needed. We have passed an ordinance related to municipal buildings, but we need one for all new construction and major renovations.

4. Do you oppose the creation of new fossil fuel infrastructure in Salem?



**YES** – I think new development should be using renewable energy and not expanding natural gas infrastructure.

5. Do you support the fare-free trolley program?

I am not sure what you are referring to here. The Salem Trolley is fare-free to Salem residents in the summer months, but this is really just a free tour. It is not a hop-on hop-off program that could enable residents to traverse the downtown while doing errands, without needing a car.

6. Do you support the expansion of the City's curbside composting pickup program?

**Yes**, but I need to understand more about what this question is asking. I support composting and I utilize and pay for the Black Earth composting service. I don't think Salem is in a place to begin a city-wide composting program, which would require land, trucks, and funds for salaries. I think we can do more to educate residents about home composting, and provide discounted compost bins. And we could look into subsidizing the Black Earth composting fees for those who can't afford the program and don't have the space to compost themselves.

7. Do you support the offshore wind project? **YES**

8. Do you support continuing the existing Blue Bikes program? **Expand**

9. Do you support the City's partnership with Boston Harbor Cruises offering ferry service to and from Boston? **YES**

10. Do you support Salem adopting Vision Zero, which guides our transportation policy towards eliminating all traffic fatalities and making our roads safer for all users? **YES**

## **(G) Housing**

1. Do you agree or disagree that Salem should do more to encourage housing production of all types, including both market rate and income-restricted? If so, how can the City encourage housing production?

The City can encourage housing production by making changes to the zoning ordinances to allow more units through gentle growth. For instance, in an R2 zone (2-family), an existing 3-family building can create an additional unit more easily than a 2-family can add a unit. That's nuts! Zoning rules have added financial burdens onto property owners who are looking to gently expand the available housing.

2. What opportunities do you see for leveraging city-owned land for expanding market rate and Affordable housing?

The City Council recently passed an ordinance that prioritizes affordable housing for all city land that is surplus and sold. That means that the RFP for the land must prioritize affordable housing.

3. Do you support rent stabilization? **YES/ NO** if yes how would you help stabilize it?

I support it in theory, but I need to understand more about the regulations and enforcement required before fully supporting it.

4. How do you plan to address the intersection of homelessness and soaring housing prices?

We need more housing in Salem, outside of Salem, all along both coasts, and in all major cities. I will continue to work to create policies that lead to gentle growth, like the ADU ordinance. Housing prices are high because housing stock is so, so low. As a region, we ALL need to create more housing and stop zoning out opportunity. This means looking at parking minimums. Our current parking minimums pave over too much usable land and creates more spaces than are needed. Transportation policy also needs to be addressed, to provide more public transportation options so that we all rely less on cars.

It hurts my heart to read about and to see individuals and families who are living in their car because they no longer can afford a home, through no fault of their own. Too often this is happening to seniors who have suffered an illness and lost their entire savings. Unfortunately, too many of us are one catastrophic illness away from homelessness. Our retirement years should not be spent living in fear of losing everything we have spent a lifetime building.

5. Do you support a Tenant Opportunity to Purchase ordinance, enabling tenants to purchase a building if the owner seeks to put it on the market?  
**YES/ NO**

I need to learn more about this before answering, but in theory, yes.

6. Do you support implementing an inclusionary development policy (IDP) in Salem at 10% as has been discussed to date? **Yes at 10% / Higher % / Lower % / Not at all**

I support Inclusionary Zoning or IDP. The percentage of affordability is more important to me than the percentage of units created. We need to build

housing that is affordable to Salem's service industry workers. That is closer to the 40-60% of the Area Median Income. Working out the sweet spot between percentage of affordability and percentage of units is the key to a successful Inclusionary Zoning ordinance, and is something I hope we begin discussion on in the next few months.

7. Do you Support the ending of mandatory minimum parking requirements for new construction? **YES/NO**

Either eliminating it or right-sizing it. And it depends on where the construction is happening. We definitely build more surface level parking than is necessary for most new construction.

8. Do you support requiring that a majority of new affordable units be built on-site, in order to ensure communities are diverse and integrated? **YES/ NO**

Yes, the affordable units need to be built on site. Too often, Inclusionary Zoning allows the developer to pay into a fund instead of building the required affordable units. This does not create the affordable units quickly enough and puts the burden on the City to get it done.

9. Across the city, there are projects for large-scale supportive housing that are being fought by local communities, such as Lee Fort Terrace, Lifebridge, etc. Do you support pushing forward with these specific projects and others like them? **YES/ NO**

I fully support the new Lee Fort Terrace building, which retains the same number of Affordable Housing units as are currently held by the Salem Housing Authority at Lee Fort Terrace, and creates additional affordable units. All current residents of Lee Fort Terrace will be given priority placement in the new building.

The Lifebridge project is still being designed. I did not support the initial concept for the project because of the building massing and the number of different services they were trying to build for on a very small piece of land. While I do think we need a fragile senior housing building, it can be located elsewhere, and is no longer part of the project. Seniors are vulnerable to housing market forces right now and need very affordable housing options. Also, the neighborhood did not support the swap of park land, and that is also off the table now. I was able to make my point of view known and understood by the developers on both of these issues. I was able to explain that the park swap would be a very heavy lift because the neighborhood did not support it,

and therefore it was unlikely that they would obtain the needed approvals required both at the local and State levels. I also made it clear that the senior housing building was inappropriate on Pratt Street because of the height and the sheer size right on top of a neighborhood of 2.5 story homes. If built, it would surely lead to the loss of our 2- and 3-family housing stock in a neighborhood which is already very fragile due to its location in the downtown. This neighborhood, which is really a perfect mix of 2- and 3-family houses, single family houses, and small apartment buildings, would surely begin to be replaced by 4- and 5-story larger scale buildings.

The project still has a ways to go in design of the two proposed buildings: one for Lifebridge operations and offices and one for housing for those transitioning out of homelessness. We have great models of this supportive transitional housing in the two Harborlight Homes properties on Boston Street.

## **(H) Economic Opportunity**

1. What steps would you propose to reduce Salem's income and wealth inequality, especially the racial wealth gap?

I think there is an opportunity to discuss and research Universal Basic Income (UBI), which provides a small income to those at the bottom of the economic scale. The funds are distributed monthly, allowing recipients to include it in their monthly budget. Studies of UBI have shown that the funds are used for housing, food, childcare, and other necessities, and enable families to have a little more breathing room. I am interested in further discussion of a pilot program here in Salem to determine if this is a program that Salem can afford, and/or if it is something we can't afford not to do because of how effective the additional income is for these families.

Income inequity is becoming more and more obvious. Since the 1970's, the middle class has been squeezed. When I was a child, my father, the only salary for our family of six, brought home a lower middle class income as a studio photographer. But he was able to buy a 3-bedroom, single family home in a really nice neighborhood. Sure, it was a lot of money even then, but he was able to purchase a home, and was able to build wealth, as most even lower middle class families were able to do.

Now, college graduates with well paying jobs are struggling to find homes, even rental units. This can't be sustained. The wealthy corporate owners need

to reassess the wage span in their companies. Janitorial staff, service workers, assembly line workers, healthcare workers are the core of successful corporations and need to earn a livable wage. But this isn't something that Salem can fix by itself. Historically, unions were pivotal in making changes that benefitted not only the working class but also the bottom lines of the companies they worked for. I think unions will be critical in right-sizing wages and addressing corporate greed.

2. Do you support requiring city contractors to give their employees at least two weeks' notice before changing their schedules and to compensate workers for late schedule changes? **YES/ NO**

I need to understand more about this issue before addressing it.

3. What steps can the Council take to achieve greater diversity in City contracting?

The Council can advocate for or write an ordinance to include diversity/equity/inclusion in the procurement process for the city.

4. The cannabis industry is expected to grow in Salem in the coming years. What steps should the City take to make sure that it grows in an equitable way, in which the communities most impacted by the drug war are able to benefit?

This is a tough question, since so much of the control lies with the state's Cannabis Control Commission. We could have, and should have, pushed for greater equity when the City chose the five cannabis shops originally.

The State's standards for cannabis delivery companies is heavily weighted towards equity applicants, which is great if those applicants are really acting as the owner and not simply being backed by a larger, wealthy company that is really making the profits. Like most things that are heavily regulated, and the cannabis industry is very heavily regulated, the up-front money required to get through the application process acts as a deterrent to most.

## **(I) Democracy**

1. How can Salem increase turnout in municipal elections?

We need to better understand why voters don't vote. There are certainly a lot of guesses, but I don't think we really know the answer. Is it a time issue? Is it

because a seat is uncontested? Is the voter not engaged with Salem government? Do they think their vote doesn't matter? Are they too busy working 2 or more jobs?

I am a founding member of the League of Women Voters of Salem and have been involved in efforts to get more voters to the polls, especially for local elections. Getting voter information out there, from trusted non-partisan sources like the LWV, has increased voter engagement. Figuring out how to increase voter turnout will take a lot more research. This is not specific to Salem either.

2. How can the council increase transparency?

All municipal bodies follow strict State laws regarding transparency. There are always more steps that can be taken, including easier access to the text for the orders we are discussing in committees, and the additional research we are using.

Last year, we amended our rules to make all of our meetings hybrid, with primary access in-person and additional access through Zoom. Additionally, our meetings are shown live on SATV, and as much as possible, they are live streamed on YouTube.

3. What are you personally doing to increase turnout in this upcoming election?

- Knocking on as many doors as I can to talk to the voters about the issues, ask them if they plan to vote, and if not, inquire about the roadblocks to voting.
- Supporting and publicizing the phenomenal work of the League of Women Voters [Voter Toolkit](#), which organizes candidate information and election calendars and details in one easy to use place.
- Including election information in my weekly newsletter (500 subscribers) and on my social media.

4. Do you support allowing non-citizens with legal status the right to vote in municipal elections? **YES/ NO**

I have not done enough research on this to offer an opinion.

5. Do you support allowing 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in municipal elections? **YES/ NO**

Undecided – I need to research this further.

6. Would you support Charter Change to allow for Ranked Choice Voting in Salem? **YES/ NO**

We are still discussing this in City Council, and still researching the options, pros and cons, and I have not yet decided. In particular, RCV for multi-seat voting still requires a really thorough discussion and policy to ensure voter confidence.

7. Do you support making hybrid access to public meetings permanent? **YES/ NO**

Yes. And in the City Council it is already permanent.

**(J) Additional Comments**

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