

Dorchester Reporter

“The News and Values Around the Neighborhood”

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1: BACKGROUND

1. What is your name, age, place of birth and present address?

Name: **Alex Gray**

Age: **37**

Place of Birth: **Quincy, MA**

Present Address: **Jamaica Plain, MA**

2. What is your present occupation? Also, please note any past employment that may be relevant to your candidacy.

I am currently a Senior Policy Manager for the City of Boston’s Office of Workforce Development, where I have worked for the last five years. Prior to this, I spent two years working as a Policy Advisor in Mayor Martin J. Walsh’s executive office. During this time, my work has focused on improving pathways to careers which include helping to create Boston’s first-ever Tuition-Free Community College program. After graduating from law school, I served as a policy advisor for Governor Deval Patrick working on public safety and transportation policy including helping to launch the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line.

I began my career in public service as an advocate during a year of service in Northern California where I helped to provide essential services such as meals and referrals to housing and transportation for individuals facing homelessness. I then moved back to Boston where I worked for the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance as their Legislative Liaison where I successfully advocated for permanent housing solutions for individuals experiencing homelessness.

3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.

In 2006, I graduated from Boston College with a bachelor’s degree in English. In 2011, I received my Juris Doctorate degree from Suffolk University School of Law.

4. Please list some of your affiliations with non-profits, civic associations and political groups.

I am an active member of the Boston Bar Association serving on their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Section. I am a member and volunteer of the Footlight Club in Jamaica Plain, a member of the Young Leaders Council for The Sports Museum, and a Volunteer Board Member for the Friends of the Jamaica Plain Library.

5. What in your experience to date will most help you to be an effective leader?

I am running for At-Large Boston City Council because my work has brought me into every neighborhood of the city and given me the experience to do the job on Day One. I began my career working for the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance where I advocated for permanent housing solutions for individuals experiencing homelessness. After graduating from law school, I worked as an advisor for Governor Deval Patrick working on public safety and transportation policy including helping to launch the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line. I have spent the past seven years as an advisor for Mayor Martin J. Walsh and the City of Boston, focused on improving pathways to careers which includes helping to create Boston's first-ever Tuition-Free Community College program.

I also believe that my lived experience makes me well-suited for this position, and that it is time for the disability community to be represented on the City Council. If elected, I would be Boston's first blind city councilor and one of only two blind city councilors currently serving in America. Being blind has taught me the value of advocating for others, because my parents and teachers advocated for me to remain and succeed in public school. It has also taught me the meaning of really listening - and hearing - others. I have found that by listening to those impacted, a good policy idea can be made great and a community can begin to thrive.

6. What are the three accomplishments you're most proud of?

During my time in public service, I am most proud of achieving these accomplishments:

Fairmount Commuter Rail Line: During my time in Governor Patrick's administration, I helped to launch the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line, serving the neighborhoods of Dorchester, Hyde Park, and Mattapan. The launching of the Fairmount Line helped to bring more equitable transportation access to the communities, better connecting people to their everyday needs.

Tuition-Free Community College: In Mayor Walsh's administration, I helped to start the city's first-ever Tuition-Free Community College program, working to make higher education more affordable for BPS graduates. Since its start, the program has had over 500 participants across the city.

Home & Healthy for Good: I successfully advocated for the Home and Healthy for Good program while at the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, which provided the housing and wrap-around services that residents needed to both be housed and remain housed.

7. Are you a member of a union?

No.

8. Please list any endorsements to date.

Individuals: Tim Murray (Former MA Lieutenant Governor), Jay Gonzalez (2018 Dem Nominee for MA Governor), Alkia Powell (Community Activist), Carol Steinberg (Attorney and Disability Activist), Leslie Templeton (Disability Advocate and Community Organizer)

Unions/Organizations: Laborers Local 223, Boston Ward 10 Democratic Committee, Massachusetts Voters for Animals, Run for Something

Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

1. What is your party affiliation and how would you characterize your political ideology?

I am a strong Democrat. I believe our elected officials have the responsibility to work to provide equitable opportunities for all of their constituents. I believe in the value of listening to and advocating for others, and the importance of building a Boston that centers the voices and needs of all its people.

2. Please name up to three (and at least one) of your political role models? Please feel free to explain your choices.

I have been fortunate to work for many great elected officials during my time in public service. I consider Secretary Marty Walsh, Governor Deval Patrick, and Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray as three of my political role models. Working firsthand with them allowed me to see examples of true public servants. I saw how hard they worked and how deeply they cared about

improving the lives of their constituents, and always admired how they were able to work with others, regardless of political differences.

3. Are you in favor of term limits for the seat you are seeking? If so, how many terms?

I am open to a conversation on term limits for elected officials that balances the benefits that elected officials gain from their time and experience in office and the need for change. I do not have a specific time period in mind at this point.

4. What would you do to increase voter turnout in the city of Boston? Do you favor same-day voter registration or lowering the voting age to 16? Do you favor mail-in voting?

Increasing voter turnout must be a top priority, as everyone deserves to have their voice heard at the ballot box. I believe that increasing access to ballots for all voters would greatly bolster turnout. This can be done in several ways, from increasing awareness of options like absentee ballots, to ensuring that polling locations and information are easily accessible. I am in favor of same-day registration, making no excuse absentee voting an option for all voters, and offering early in-person voting opportunities in the weeks leading up to election day. Ultimately, the more opportunities we give people to cast their vote and the more we do to educate people about these opportunities, will hopefully increase turnout in our elections.

5. Do you think that Boston should adopt a rank-choice voting system in upcoming election cycles?

I am open to a conversation about adopting a rank-choice voting system in upcoming elections.

Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

1. What is your top priority if elected?

If elected, my top priorities would be:

Jobs & Economic Relief: As we work to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that we implement policy centered on the communities that have been most impacted: people of color, seniors, the disability community, and front line workers. In addition to this, we must focus our recovery efforts on small businesses in our Main Street districts that serve as the backbone of our neighborhoods. As we build back from the

pandemic, it is vital that we take bold steps to expand job opportunities for residents that pay a living wage and offer the benefits that they deserve. I believe that Bostonians should be connected to the jobs of the future.

Housing: As a city councilor, I will work to develop more affordable and accessible housing options for our residents. It is vital that we ensure that these housing options connect Bostonians to transportation, school, work, healthcare, businesses, and green spaces. Everyone in the city deserves to have quality access to their everyday needs.

Education: It is imperative that we fully fund our schools with the necessary resources to provide a quality learning environment for each and every student. As a Boston City Council member, I will work to ensure that our students and educators have everything that they need to succeed in the classroom.

2. How will you approach the issue of gun violence in our communities?

Gun violence is a serious problem across the country. In order to combat this crisis we need to be taking action at all levels of government. Here in Boston, we must increase our investments in our communities, especially those most harmed by gun violence. This means strengthening our outreach programs, particularly those focused on children and teens, in order to help ensure our youth stay on the right pathways. We must also ensure that trauma resources are available to every neighborhood.

3. Is there a specific city agency you see as in need of urgent reform? If so, please explain.

Boston has a strong city government which is made up of many talented individuals. All departments can continue to change and improve as our city does and I look forward to playing a part in these changes and improvements.

4. What is your position on residency, i.e. requiring people hired by the municipal government to live in the city of Boston?

I believe that having City Employees live in the City of Boston brings value to our workforce through their familiarity and knowledge of the issues that our city faces. I believe that there should be at least a minimum number of years that our City employees are required to live in Boston.

5. The city of Boston presently owns and manages the historic Strand Theater in Uphams Corner. How would you seek to program, market and utilize this asset?

The Strand Theater is an iconic venue in Boston. I would love to see it continue to provide a variety of diverse performances that reflect the richness of our city. It would be great to have it open to our student performances and community theater organizations.

6. What is your position on vaccinations? Should students be required to be vaccinated for Covid-19 to attend school in Boston?

I believe that vaccines are the best tools we have to combat the ongoing pandemic. I am grateful to have received the vaccine as soon as I became eligible, and strongly encourage everyone to get vaccinated in order to protect themselves and those around them.

We must continue to work to create vaccine equity and ensure that all residents of every neighborhood in Boston have equal access to receiving the vaccine. With the Delta variant on the rise, increasing the number of vaccinated residents in the city is paramount to overcoming this pandemic. This is especially important for our students, as we look towards reopening our schools in the fall. For those students that are not vaccinated, weekly testing should be performed in order to provide the safest environment for our students and teachers and decrease the likelihood of another school shutdown.

7. Do you favor a return to an elected School Committee? Please explain.

I support a hybrid model in regards to the makeup of the School Committee. I support half of the members being appointed by the Mayor of Boston and I am open to a conversation on whether the second half should be elected directly by voters or should be voted on by specific groups such as the City Council, students, teachers, etc. My fear is that if all of the positions are elected, certain community voices will be left out and not have a seat at the table.

Earlier in my campaign, I called for one seat on the School Committee to be designated for an individual with experience in the special education community. Twenty-one percent of Boston Public School students have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and I want to ensure that they are represented on the School Committee.

8. Do you support the recent decision of the BPS and School Committee to alter the admission plan for the city's three exam schools?

I thought it made sense to make the difficult decision to put a pause on the entrance exam during the pandemic for the upcoming school year. In terms of the recent decision regarding the admission plan, I felt that there was a place for the exam to remain a part of that process. It is important for us to ensure that neighborhoods across the city have access to our exam schools but it is also important for families to have time to plan the future of their children's education properly.

My top priority in education will always be ensuring that special education students have access to classrooms across the city and that they have the resources they need to succeed. Sadly, special education is far too often left out of the conversations we have on education, whether it is exam school entrance requirements or other conversations.

9. Do you support the citywide ballot question that would hand new budgetary powers to the City Council?

I support the ballot measure and look forward to continuing the conversation on how the City Council can play a greater role in making budget decisions in Boston.

10. The city of Boston is presently without a permanent police commissioner. What should the next mayor do to fill the position and what type of person should be selected to lead the BPD?

I believe that a national search should take place to find the city's next police commissioner. We must find someone that is committed to community policing and accountability and understands the importance of centering the needs of Boston communities, which are unique and diverse.

11. Do you support the redevelopment of City Hall and City Hall Plaza?

I support the examination of ways to make Boston City Hall and City Hall Plaza more welcoming and accessible to our residents and visitors.

12. What is your assessment of the Climate Ready Boston initiative conceived and executed to date by the Walsh administration? Is this initiative a sufficient response to prepare for the anticipated climate change in coming years and decades? What else might you do to build climate resiliency in the city of Boston?

I believe the Climate Ready Boston initiative is a strong first step towards fighting climate change. In order to both build climate resilience and make Boston more equitable, we must make it easy for all residents to bike, walk, ride the bus, and ride the T. We must

invest in clean energy and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and our greenhouse gas emissions.

13. A millionaires tax is expected to be on the statewide ballot in 2022. How do you plan to vote?

I plan to vote in favor.

14. Should gig workers be considered company employees, rather than independent contractors?

I believe gig workers should be considered employees and will support all efforts to make this become a reality.

15. A report commissioned by the Walsh administration found that just 1.2 percent of city contracts awarded between 2014-2018 were awarded to Black or Latino-owned businesses. What would you do to change that?

I believe that we need to have a specific approach for the three main facets of city contracting: construction, goods, and services. Additionally, we need to make it easier to separate contracts into smaller parts so that more businesses, especially those owned by people of color, can better compete for them.

16. In 2018, the Walsh administration set a goal of creating 69,000 new units of housing in Boston by 2030. What is your assessment of this target — and what would your office do to balance growth with the concerns that many have about displacement in neighborhoods like Dorchester?

At the time, I believe that this number was reflective of the growing population in the city, however I am open to revising this target. I would revisit the usage of public lands as an opportunity to expand affordable housing without displacing people. As we come out of the pandemic, I think that we also should be looking at the lower demand for office space as a potential opportunity to be shifted towards housing. We must continue to support the Boston Housing Authority and Community Development Corporations with as many resources as possible because these types of organizations are proven leaders in providing affordable housing.

17. What is your assessment of the Walsh administration's overall performance? Please offer a letter grade or pass/fail as part of your answer.

Grade: Pass. Mayor Walsh was a great Mayor who was a national leader on standing up for working people here in Boston. I was proud to work for his administration and saw every day how he led with compassion and concern for others.

18. What is your assessment of the acting Mayor Kim Janey's performance since taking office in March 2021? Please offer a letter grade or pass/fail as part of your answer.

Grade: Pass. Mayor Janey came into office during an incredibly challenging time, and I know she is working hard every day to meet the needs of Bostonians. I have enjoyed getting to know her and all of the mayoral candidates on the campaign trail and would be honored to serve under any of them.

19. Will you seek to expand or change the composition of the Zoning Board of Appeals? If so, how?

I am always open to listening to the needs and concerns of the residents of Boston and this includes the Zoning Board of Appeal. I will pay particular attention to ensure that the needs of the disability community are reflected on the ZBA when it comes to the physical accessibility of our physical structures.

20. When not on the campaign trail, how do you unwind?

When not on the campaign trail, I enjoy spending time with my wife, Lauren, and our newborn son, Emerson. Seeing them both after a long day on the campaign trail always brings me joy.

I am also an avid Boston sports fan, and enjoy going to Red Sox, Celtics, and Boston College football games.

21. If you were not a candidate, who would you support in this election for either Mayor or City Council?

I have been fortunate to get to know many of the Mayoral and City Council candidates throughout my career as well as on the campaign trail. They are good people that have a lot to offer our city. I would be fortunate to work alongside any of them.

Thank you for participating in the Dorchester Reporter questionnaire. Please send the completed document as a PDF or WordDoc to newseditor@dotnews.com by Fri. Aug. 8, 2021.