

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?

Annissa Essaibi George, 47, I was born in Dorchester and now live at 32 Mayhew Street in Dorchester.

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

I am a Boston City Councilor At-Large, representing the entire city. I am also the owner of Stitch House in Dorchester. Prior to joining the City Council, I was a teacher at East Boston High School for thirteen years and former Boston Main Streets Director for Fields Corner.

3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.

I am a proud graduate of Boston Tech (now the John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science), Boston University (B.A) and UMass Boston (Master of Education).

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

*Member, Board of Directors- Dot House Health
Former President of Columbia-Savin Hill Civic Association*

*Former President of Friends of Ryan Playground
Former Dorchester Day Parade Committee*

*Former Little & Young Miss Dorchester Event Chair
Member McCormack Civic Association*

Member of Dorchester Historical Society

Former East Boston High School Girls Softball Coach (while teaching)

Former East Boston Girls' Youth Softball Coach (community program)

*Former RBI Softball Dorchester Coach
Former member of Columbia Point Task Force
Member Dorchester Board of Trade*

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

As an At-Large City Councilor, I represent the entire city. I have worked on issues ranging from housing and homelessness to education to mental health. While I am proud of my legislative accomplishments, I am most proud of the relationships that I have built throughout my time on the Council. I take the responsibility of representing every resident in the City of Boston very seriously. More than any other experience or accomplishment, I believe the fact that I show up in all of our neighborhoods is what has made me an effective City Councilor, and it is what will make me an effective Mayor. I know that I wouldn't have been able to accomplish half of the things I have on the Council if I didn't show up, have the tough conversations, and give everyone a seat at the table. I take pride in the fact that I bring

residents' experiences to the table just as much as I bring my own, and that is what I will continue to do as Mayor.

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

- 1. My time on the Council as the leading voice around issues of homelessness, mental health and recovery. These conversations shaped my ordinance to create a special commission to end family homelessness in Boston that was unanimously passed by the City Council.*
- 2. My thirteen years as a classroom teacher at East Boston High School. These experiences gave me a front row seat to the challenges our students and families face day in and day out.*
- 3. My leadership in organizing the City's first citywide Needle Take Back Day in 2019.*

7. Are you a member of a union?

I was a member of the Boston Teachers Union prior to joining the City Council.

8. Please list any endorsements to date.

Massachusetts Nurses Association, Professional Fire Fighters of Massachusetts, Boston Firefighters Local 718, I.B.E.W. Local 2222, AFSCME Council 93, Boston EMS Union, Former Boston Police Commissioner William Gross

Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

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

Democrat. My approach to my work is rooted in reality in order to deliver results to every single neighborhood. I would describe my leadership style as a convener and a collaborator. I believe the best and fastest way to make progress is by having the tough and necessary conversations with everyone at the table to move toward solutions and action.

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

My father immigrated to Boston from Tunisia and, despite the challenges he faced, loved this city with every part of his being. When I was a teenager I remember telling him I wanted to run for mayor. He responded with “A girl with an Arab name like yours will never win anything in this city”. He wanted his children to be aware of politics and the role of government in society, especially at a global scale, but did not see an opportunity for me to be directly involved at the local level. I know he’d be so proud of my accomplishments and would be my biggest cheerleader in this race.

I also think often of my maternal grandmother who at a young age was taken from her home in Poland to work in a labor camp in Germany. Following World War II she met my grandfather in a Displaced Persons’ Camp, where my mom was born. They immigrated to the United States when she was young. My grandmother’s spirit, determination and

focus on her family and building a better life for them reminds me how important this opportunity is for me to lead for her, and because of her sacrifice.

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

Given that Boston's mayors are elected by the people every four years, I believe the necessary checks and balances of limits on a Mayor's term already exist. We have a long history of Boston mayors who have been elected by the voters to serve multiple terms. Our city's leadership is ultimately up to the voters to decide and I believe we should leave that power and decision at the ballot box with them.

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?

I believe we should make it easier for people to vote and become more politically engaged, especially at

the local level. For me, that includes supporting efforts for same-day voter registration and mail-in voting as well as exploring legislation that would make Election Day a federal holiday. However, I do not support lowering the voting age.

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

Yes.

Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

1. What is your top priority if elected?

As a Boston Public Schools (BPS) grad, a former BPS teacher, a mom to four students in BPS, and the current Boston City Council Committee on Education Chair, one of my top priorities will be supporting and empowering our students, teachers, and families. This includes rebuilding trust, closing the achievement and opportunity gap and making sure we focus on literacy programs—especially in

the early years. Our schools have been struggling for a long time, and the issues facing students and educators are even more pronounced as a result of the pandemic. We need to create district wide curriculum and graduation requirements to ensure that all students are receiving a high quality education, regardless of what school they attend. Boston is known as a national leader when it comes to education, but we're falling short when it comes to preparing our kids to enter the workforce. We need to lift up Madison Park Vocational Technical School and invest in career-focused education across the district to prepare all of our kids for a successful and fulfilling life.

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

The epidemic of gun violence continues to plague the City of Boston, disproportionately impacting low income and communities of color. Gun violence is a racial justice issue, a public safety issue, and a public health issue. In order to combat this epidemic, the City, the Boston Police Department, community

leaders, and residents will need to work as a team. As Mayor, I will implement a multi-agency approach which leans heavily on addressing the underlying causes of gun violence through a public health lens, interrupting cycles of violence, trauma and racism, and decriminalizing mental health, homelessness, substance use disorder and poverty. For my complete plan to address gun violence, visit <https://www.annissaforboston.com/2021/06/04/tackling-gun-violence-in-our-neighborhoods/>.

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

I believe that the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) is in need of urgent reform. The BPDA has fallen short when it comes to ensuring thoughtful and equitable growth, especially when it comes to the affordable housing crisis. As Mayor, I would dramatically reform the BPDA by creating a separate planning office to ensure forward-thinking and inclusive development. A distinct planning office will prioritize the wants and needs of neighborhoods

and allow for greater public participation when it comes to development in our city.

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

Ideally, all city employees would live here and make Boston their home. When you're on the ground, living in our communities, seeing and hearing directly from residents, I imagine one's understanding and response would be different and likely more informed. Many city employees, however, are allowed to live outside of Boston because of collective bargaining agreements. We need to get to the place where everyone who wants to remain here, live here, can. That means building more affordable housing for our families, improving our public school systems, and creating more opportunities for our neighborhoods to grow and thrive.

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?

One of the biggest parts of what makes Boston such a vibrant place to live is our local artists and creative community. Boston certainly has world class arts institutions and performing arts theaters, but most of those are centralized in the Downtown Core and Theatre District. The Strand Theater has a legacy of providing that same type of cultural anchor institution, but outside that typical area and within a community of color. We need to honor, celebrate, support and continue that legacy. As Mayor, I'll forge partnerships with local non-profits and arts organizations to activate and utilize the Strand Theater. I also believe the Strand Theater provides us with a unique opportunity and space for our Boston Public Schools students—whether that's hands-on experience with set design or lighting or a performing arts stage. Our students are incredibly talented and we should be leveraging our city-owned assets to foster and keep that talent right here in Boston.

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

Getting shots in arms is critical to ending this pandemic. Throughout the pandemic I have advocated for meeting people where they are, in their neighborhoods, in order to distribute the vaccine equitably and efficiently. This includes mobilizing our EMTs and supporting our community health centers. I was also very vocal about vaccinating our educators and am supportive of doing whatever it takes to get our students back in the classroom. We also need to continue aggressive and accessible testing opportunities throughout our City.

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

No. I believe that the School Committee members need to be empowered to make the best decisions for students and families without the influence of

politics or money, and that is impossible with an elected School Committee. Instead, I believe that the best model is a nine member Committee with five people appointed by the Mayor and four appointed in partnership with the City Council. The mayoral appointments will be used to ensure diversity and representation of key stakeholders and experts. The City Council appointments will go through a public nomination and hearing process, allowing for greater community participation in the process. This structure will ensure that the School Committee is better equipped to represent and serve all of Boston's students while maintaining mayoral accountability and offering the City Council a greater role in shaping the direction of BPS. I will also work to make the nomination and appointment process more transparent by creating clear public guidelines for the Citizens Nominating Panel and sharing more information about how members are selected. We can have a more transparent, representative, and effective School Committee while also protecting BPS from the influence of politics and elections.

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? *No.*

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

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?

As Mayor, I will be looking for an individual who can strengthen trust between the police department and our communities and make real changes to ensure that our officers are being held to the highest standards. In order to find such a candidate, I will work with people across the city to hear more about what they want and expect from the next police commissioner. I will also ensure that anyone being considered for the position will undergo an extensive background check and vetting process. It's critical that the next police commissioner build upon

Boston's reputation for community policing and ensure our neighborhoods are both safe and just.

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

I'm excited by the renovation of City Hall Plaza. It will allow for a more accessible, welcoming and versatile space. Great things happen inside of City Hall, so any chance we have to make it more of an exciting destination for people is good with me.

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 think the work that's already been done as part of the Climate Ready Boston initiative has been a critical first step to making Boston a more resilient city, but we certainly have a lot more work to do. My

priority as Mayor will be to ensure that our frontline communities are the ones driving any conversations or decisions being made around climate resiliency and sustainability. Low-income neighborhoods and communities of color often bear the brunt of environmental injustice, yet they're often left out of the conversation around how to address climate change. My climate action plans will be rooted in and informed by the most vulnerable communities. There is always more than can and should be done when it comes to fighting climate change, especially in a coastal city like Boston, and I'm looking forward to doing that work as Mayor.

13. A millionaires tax is expected to be on the statewide ballot in 2022. How do you plan to vote?
On the Council, I voted for a resolution supporting the tax, and I will support it in 2022.

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

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 have already started on this work. As a City Councilor, I introduced a Home Rule Petition that would tackle these inequities head on. It amends our current process to ensure that minority and women-owned businesses can not only fairly compete, but be awarded these opportunities at a far higher level than we're currently seeing. My HRP makes actual legislative changes to the process, which is a necessary step since in order to make these changes we are required to change state law.

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?

It's critical the next Mayor keeps pace with the Walsh Administration's ambitious housing goals, especially as we think about how this relates to our economic recovery coming out of the past year. But increasing our housing stock is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to Boston's housing crisis. We need to be more intentional about the type of housing we're building. If the housing we create isn't realistic for most families or residents, then it doesn't matter how many new units we create. As Mayor, I will focus on creating affordable, affordable housing for those who don't qualify for subsidized housing, but still can't afford to pay market rate. I will also ensure our housing stock reflects the needs and realities of our residents, including multi-bedroom affordable housing for families, workforce housing, artist live/work spaces and senior specific housing. I will also prioritize planning that addresses the needs and wants of our specific neighborhoods while also carrying out our overall city-wide vision. We need to plan and then build for the future of this city to foster inclusive growth in all of our neighborhoods.

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.

B+. Mayor Walsh laid a solid foundation for many of the policies and initiatives that I plan, as Mayor, to build upon. He was also extremely engaged: in our neighborhoods, with community leaders, and with the Boston City Council and City employees. He was always willing to have tough conversations, even if we did not always agree, and as a result, I and many others were able to work with him to make real progress on issues that mattered to us and those we represent.

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

D. Acting Mayor Janey has failed to meet our expectations and has demonstrated that she is more willing to celebrate her time in office than to work alongside others to get things done. After 100 days

with no plans and no actions to improve our schools or our housing challenges, combat violence or our opioid crisis, or help small businesses and working families recover, I hoped we'd be in a far better place as a city than we are.

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

I believe to make our zoning process more consistent and predictable we need to get to the root cause. That means updating and streamlining our decades-old zoning processes to be more transparent and better align with our city's housing needs, so that we have modernized and updated guidelines for development in Boston. I would be open to exploring an increase to the number of seats on the Zoning Board of Appeals.

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

You can often find me knitting in between Zoom calls and meetings! And as often as I can, you will find me at the ball field or the hockey rink cheering on my boys.

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

If there was someone else in this race that I felt could run this city better than me, I would not be running for Mayor.