

Dorchester Reporter

"The News and Values Around the Neighborhood"

2023 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1: BACKGROUND

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

Jennifer Johnson, 54 years old

Born: Covington, Louisiana

Current Address: 69 Mt Ida Rd #1, Dorchester, MA 02122

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

Present: Business Owner, Employee Benefits (8 years)

From 1989-1999 worked for progressive organizations, Fund for Public Interest Research, MASSPIRG and the Share Group raising funds for environmental causes, LGBTQ rights and the Democratic party and candidates.

3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.

Louisiana School for Math, Science & the Arts, Class of 1986

Bryn Mawr College, 1986-1988

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

President, Meetinghouse Hill Civic Association

Board, Bowdoin Geneva Main Streets

Board, Friends of Coppens Square

Recruiter, Ward 15 Democratic Committee

Member, First Parish Dorchester

Member, Mass Audobon Society

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

Leading the Meetinghouse Hill Civic Association has given me the experience of convening residents, city officials and employees, developers, small business owners and others to address housing, public safety and business development in my neighborhood. I've learned to listen to concerns and represent and advocate for the neighborhood. This role has given me the skills to be an effective leader and councilor for District 3.

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

1. *Coming to Boston on my own at 20 years old, knowing no one, having a job with the Fund for Public Interest Research, \$400 to my name and building my life here over the last 34 years.*

2. *Sponsoring my stepson so he could become an American citizen.*
3. *Buying my own condo in 2006.*

7. Are you a member of a union? *No, I am not a union member. However, my grandmother was a public school teacher in Louisiana and was a union member. I knew from a young age how important unions are for working people.*

8. Please list any endorsements to date.
Ward 15 Democratic Committee

Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

1. What is your party affiliation and how would you characterize your political ideology? *I am a lifelong Democrat and a pragmatic liberal who wants to get things done.*
2. Please name up to three (and at least one) of your political role models? Please feel free to explain your choices.

Jack, Bobby and Teddy were my political role models growing up in Louisiana. They stood up to help working people and the poor. And President Kennedy and Attorney General Kennedy substantially changed my life by using their power to desegregate schools in the South. I was the first person in my family to go to desegregated schools and having friends and classmates who were not white changed the course of my life.

3. Are you in favor of term limits for the seat you are seeking? If so, how many terms? *I've always believed that voters are the term limit.*

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? Would you support combining municipal and state/federal elections into even numbered years to increase turnout in municipal elections?

I support same-day registration and mail-in voting. I also believe Civics should be reestablished in our high schools so young adults understand our government, our Constitution and their duty as citizens. As to combining elections, I think it is more a matter of educating people that general elections take place every year in November on the second Tuesday.

Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

1. What is your top priority if elected?

Housing is my top priority. The city has a housing crisis for those not already owners. We need more housing, and more housing that the average person can afford. Our housing should be for everyone who wants to live in the city, from restaurant to home health care workers to teachers, police officers and fire fighters, CEOs and our seniors. Additionally, we need policies that don't force renters to move every couple of years. There is a general

misunderstanding that renters are transient and don't want to live long-term in District 3. I've spoken to many who love Dorchester and District 3 being forced out by costs. Our housing should also include permanent, supportive solutions for those experiencing addiction, including those at Mass and Cass. And, finally, we need more senior housing for when seniors are no longer able to age in place.

2. How will you approach the issue of gun violence in our communities?
Stopping gun violence starts long before a young person picks up a gun. By the time that has happened, we have failed as a city, because that young person has lost hope. We are being unfair to our city's kids when all our schools do not have libraries or offer art, music and sports. Our public schools must offer all our kids opportunities to learn more than academics. Our public schools need to show our kids their opportunities based on their own skills, interests and talents.

The city also needs to regularly offer gun buyback programs to get unregistered guns out of homes.

Additionally, when gun violence does happen we need to make sure we are addressing the trauma experienced by the victims' and shooters' families as well as by the neighborhood in which the violence occurred.

As a District Councilor, I will make sure to visit the families in District 3 who have been impacted by this violence to insure they are receiving the support they need.

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

While not an agency, the Boston Public Schools urgently need reforming so that all our kids have access to safe schools that offer libraries, art, music and sports.

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 Boston is best served when city employees live in the city. When city employees' lives are the same as the city's residents, the city employees will be better able to address concerns, issues and policies our residents have and need. I realize because of housing costs, many are encouraging an end to the residency requirement. I believe this is the wrong solution. The correct solution is to improve our housing policy in the city which may be able to include building housing for city employees, just as we do for artists.

5. Do you favor a return to an elected School Committee? Please explain.
I believe in democracy, and while non-binding, residents of Boston strongly supported a referendum to return to an elected School Committee.

6. Boston doesn't have enough housing to meet the demand. Separately, the

Wu administration wants to see a return of the city's population to 800,000. 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 and Mattapan?

Growth should include a mix of affordable, workforce and market rate housing. We should look at opportunities such as rent to own, land trusts and coop housing as well. This housing mix has worked well in Upham's Corner and has kept displacement from happening. My office would look to model the success of Upham's Corner across the district as we build more housing.

7. What is your position on rent control?

I am in favor of finding ways to stabilize and decrease housing costs. This can include measures to end rent gouging, subsidies to small landlords and incentives for developers to build more affordable and workforce housing.

8. What is your position on the reforms the Wu administration is undertaking, aimed at the zoning code and the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA)?

Long overdue. I applaud Mayor Wu for tackling these reforms.

9. What do you think are the lessons learned from the Covid pandemic, and what would you advocate to change in city health policy as a result of the lessons learned?

Isolation is a major health determinant. Our students' social isolation during the pandemic has had major negative mental, social and educational impacts. As a city, we need to address social isolation as a public health matter. Both for our kids and for our seniors.

We also learned how many families of District 3 are food insecure once they were in the position of feeding their family 3 meals a day. We should continue the policy of making sure our kids have access to breakfasts and lunch during the summer break.

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

I would offer a B- on overall performance. While I agree with many of the Wu administration's overall policy goals, the implementation of plans is frequently lacking in community involvement. Promised transparency seems to have been dropped.

11. The Red Line and several commuter rail lines run through Dorchester and Mattapan. How will you advocate for better service and conditions on public transit? *I will keep an eye on the stations for needed upkeep and report to our state legislators for budget priorities.*

12. What would you do to make Dorchester Avenue and Blue Hill Avenue better roadways?

These roads need more regular re-paving. Timing of lights should be reviewed. Also, more trees should be added to reduce the heat zone and beautify the roads, making them more attractive to pedestrians and those on bikes.

13. What are your plans to reorient our neighborhoods to center around pedestrians and bikers?

Our streets at parks, schools and senior centers need to have appropriate street safety and traffic calming measures—cross walks, speed bumps, etc. Where roads are wide enough we can add bike lanes. I'd also support the proposal for the greenway from Ashmont to Fields Corner and would support studying if that greenway could be extended further.

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

I love to travel and still have Oklahoma, Kansas, Utah and Alaska to visit. Walks through many of the state's parks and forests, taking photographs of the landscapes and flowers. Also, I'm a lifelong movie fanatic. If I'm not at South Bay catching a new release, I'm at home streaming a movie online.

Thank you for participating in the Dorchester Reporter questionnaire. Please send the completed document as a PDF or WordDoc to newseditor@dotnews.com by Friday, Aug. 18, 2023.