

## 2023 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

### Section 1: BACKGROUND

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

Joel Richards - 39 - New Rochelle, NY - 1 Parkman Place, Dorchester

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

I am currently a Boston Public School teacher and have been a public school teacher for over 17 years.

3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.

I got my undergraduate from Morehouse College and went on to get my Masters in Education from Union University.

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

I am a member of the Boston Teachers Union, a chair of Boston Black Lives Matter at School, a founder of Dorchester Juneteenth, and a board member of Boston Little Saigon.

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

One of my many blessings has been the opportunity to act as a traveling minister providing relief for faith leaders. This has exposed me to many of the diverse neighborhoods of Boston and has allowed me to connect with them on a fundamental level. I have gotten to know the district and the people who make Boston amazing. This role has exposed me to the daunting challenges of my neighbors who are lacking money to pay for basic childcare, wondering where their next paycheck will come from, or whether their child is receiving a good education. They are witnessing soaring rent prices and property taxes, and are unsure if they can continue to call Boston home.

The fact that my neighbors are comfortable coming to me in my role as a faith leader and community member has given me the confidence and inner determination to take their concerns to the city hall where the policy that affects them is decided.

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

- 1) Working with my fellow teachers, parents, and BPS officials across Boston to get a social worker in every school. Over the two years, this policy has been in effect, I have personally seen dozens of lives that have been changed for the better.
- 2) Starting the Dorchester Juneteenth celebration. Watching this annual celebration has been one of my most fulfilling achievements as a community member. Every year we're seeing a bigger success and celebrating the progress we've made in racial justice so far while also considering the road ahead.
- 3) My work as a pastor, preaching across Boston and giving pastors rest has been a great honor for me.

7. Are you a member of a union?

I am a proud member of BTU Local 66.

8. Please list any endorsements to date.

SEIU 1199, United Auto Workers Local 9, Run For Something

## **Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS**

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

I am a registered Democrat and I want to focus on a politics that's less about fighting and more about bringing people together.

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

Roger and Claire Dewey: As fellow educators and long-time Dorchester residents, they have taught me what commitment to our community looks like.

Shirley Chisholm: Her struggle for all working-class communities in the face of great opposition has been a major influence on how I view elected office. I hope to mirror this activism and bring it to District 3.

Mel King: His leadership in Boston has greatly influenced my work as a teacher, specifically that to truly uplift and educate our youth it takes organizing the community around them and collaborating with their family.

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

I am in favor of term limits, at this moment I support 6 terms totaling 12 years.

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?

For the health of both our democracy and our city, I believe it is imperative we increase voter turnout in Boston. We can achieve this by making voting more accessible and breaking down current barriers. On top of passing same-day voter registration and keeping mail-in voting, I support increasing the number of polling locations and expanding in-person early voting. After my 17 years of teaching, I have come to support lowering our voting age to 16 for municipal elections. We need to bring our youth into the process, not push them out of it.

### **Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES**

1. What is your top priority if elected?

Education would be my top priority. As a Boston Public Schools teacher and father of two BPS students, I see the importance of investing in high-quality and equitable public education. Unfortunately, this investment is not happening for all students within the Boston Public Schools system. This side of Boston hasn't seen a school built here in fifty years, and our current schools are lacking the proper facilities, equipment, and maintenance our students deserve. As City Councilor, I will work with my union, community groups, parents, and students to demand a budget that brings opportunity to all students and updates our educational infrastructure.

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

Gun violence is a personal issue for me. As a Boston Public School teacher, I have both witnessed and felt the impact this needless violence has on our communities. We must take immediate action on gun violence, working with the city to cut off the flow of guns while investing in preventative measures targeted at our youth.

I applaud the current efforts to bring together community organizations, schools, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and government agencies to tackle gun violence. As a City Councilor, I will continue to expand upon this work. We need to also invest in professionals who can meet youth where they are at, in the school, at parks, and in the community and redirect them now before they do something they cannot undo. We must also implement evidence-based programs that target at-risk youth and communities, providing education,

mentorship, and alternatives to violence. Finally, as a city we must collect and analyze data on gun violence incidents to inform evidence-based strategies and allocate resources effectively.

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

The Boston Planning and Development Agency is in need of urgent reform. We need comprehensive planning, and development that does not leave our communities in disarray. There have been numerous proposals that adversely affect our working families and lifetime D3 residents for the sake of making a quick buck.

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

I strongly believe that workers for the City of Boston should be encouraged to live in Boston. With that being said, with it being so difficult to attract and keep city employees due to the unaffordability of Boston, I would be open to reviewing the current residency requirements.

Almost every public employee wants to live in the city they work for, but we need to do more to ensure our workers can afford to live in the city they help make great. I see it in the school system when teachers live in the community they teach, they are able to better connect with their students. Let's make it possible for that to be commonplace.

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

I favor a publicly elected School Committee. I am entering my 17th year as a public school teacher, and this experience has shown me that a committee accountable to the families and communities of Boston is essential to an equitable school system. Without a fully elected school committee, we cannot ensure a school system that benefits all students and families. What we really need is a body that will deliver a meaningful voice to our parents, teachers, and students.

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?

Our city is facing a housing crisis that can only be solved through building more affordable housing for both purchase and rent. It is crucial that this future construction can not come at the cost of displacement. Displacement of our families disrupts social networks and harms our sense of community. To balance growth with displacement, as a city we must:

- Comprehensive planning that strengthens policies that encourage the development of truly affordable housing units such as strengthening our inclusionary zoning policy.

- Explore measures such as rent control, tenant protections, and restrictions on speculative real estate investment to prevent displacement.
- Support organizations such as Boston Little Saigon and the Dorchester Historical Society along with initiatives that preserve the cultural identity of neighborhoods while allowing for responsible development.

Addressing housing demand and displacement concerns requires a comprehensive, long-term approach. The city should engage in proactive planning that takes into account projected population growth and the unique characteristics of our neighborhoods.

7. What is your position on rent control?

Our city is facing an affordable housing crisis that is crushing our neighbors, with an increasing share of community members having to pay 50% or more of their income on rent. This has both exacerbated our homeless crisis and has led to a constant stream of community members having to leave the neighborhoods they were raised in to search for affordable housing elsewhere. Rent control is not the silver bullet, but it is the much-needed tourniquet that will stop the hemorrhaging of working families from Boston due to drastic price increases.

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)?

I respect the Wu's administration's effort to reform the BPDA, this is an agency in desperate need of reform. I believe that the city needs to urgently implement a comprehensive development policy- one where projects do not work independently of each other, but rather in tandem with one another so that they're better able to operate and ensure that the community is not adversely affected by the inaction or action that was anticipated in a project, but not properly enforced/readily accessible.

Too much of the development in this City leaves out communities most vulnerable to its proliferation.

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?

As a public school teacher, I saw firsthand the failures of our government. Particularly in the schools we did not take into account some of the disparities at home that affected children getting an education in adjusted circumstances at home. Many students had to suffer through poor wifi connection while some had none at all. Additionally, we showed what state our schools are in. The pandemic highlighted the need for our education system to be adjusted for all of our

Boston youth, take better care of our teachers, improve our school's facilities, and build new ones on this side of town. However, there are some seriously positive lessons as well. We learned what we can do when we put the effort in as a community. We saw that when we supported our small businesses with outdoor dining permits and other amenities we were able to prop up pillars of the community instead of letting them fall.

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 give the Michelle Wu administration a B.

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?

As a daily redline commuter, I feel the burden of poorly managed public transit. If elected, comprehensive planning around transit will be a main priority. I will have the opportunity to work with both federal and state leaders to address traffic, and more broadly, transit issues afflicting our community. The redline not working effectively affects both the lifestyle of D3 residents and our health. With the billions given by the build-back better plan, we need to add more stops to the Braintree line, lift Morrissey Boulevard so it no longer floods, and finally remove "K" circle so traffic is able to steadily flow. I also want to work for unimpeded bus lanes on Mass Ave so the "Number one bus" can move through traffic smoothly and safely.

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

Major road arteries like Dorchester Ave and Blue Hill Ave are the backbones of our district and our city, they carry workers from the suburbs into our city and workers back into our community. We are the only city in America where people cut through the city to get around traffic. You would never say "Let's cut through Brooklyn to get to New Jersey faster." We need to think about why it is that people resort to speeding down our small side streets to avoid this stretch of road. To improve traffic on our local streets we need to improve the traffic surrounding us. If people could reliably use Morrissey Boulevard, Mass Ave, or the Redline, our local streets would be significantly less impacted.

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

D3 does not need poorly thought-out lanes that impede the flow of traffic, it deserves properly separated bike lanes that are safe for both cyclists and drivers. Bike infrastructure is necessary, but it needs to be intentionally placed.

Morrissey BLVD would be a great place for a separate pedestrian walkway and bikeway. One that prioritizes the safety of both riders and drivers alike, allowing bikers to ride safely to work or for leisure.

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

When not on the campaign trail I spend as much time as I can with my three children, especially my newborn.

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