

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: John Barros*
- *Age: 47*
- *Place of birth: Boston*
- *Address: 48 Virginia Street, Dorchester*

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

- *First-ever Chief of Economic Development for the City of Boston, 2014-2021*
- *Past experience: Executive Director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, 1999-2013; Boston School Committee member, 2010-2013; part-owner of Restaurante Cesaria, the first full-service Cape Verdean restaurant in the Boston area, since 2002; Executive Liability Underwriter, Chubb Group, 1996-1999.*

3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.

- *High School Diploma, Boston College High School*
- *Bachelor of Arts, Dartmouth College*
- *Masters of Public Policy, Tufts University*
- *Certificate in Leadership, University of South Africa, Business School.*
- *Received an honorary Doctorate of Commerce from Suffolk University in 2015, as well as an honorary Associates of Arts in Human Services Administration from Urban College in 2019.*
- *2007 Barr Foundation Fellow*
- *Served on the Community Advisory Board for Northeastern University's Race and Justice Institute and the Board of the New Democracy Coalition.*
- *Elected Co-Chairperson of the Center for Community Builders, a national practitioner network.*
- *Member of the Aspen Institute's Roundtable on Community Change.*
- *Awards: the inaugural Community Service Award from the Boston Day & Evening Academy in 2008; the Robert Leo Ruffin Award from the Archdiocese of Boston in 2004; the Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) Roxbury Community Award in 2000.*

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

- *Lay leader at St. Patrick's Church, and was appointed the Coordinator of the Cape Verdean Apostolate for the Archdiocese of Boston.*
- *First youth elected to the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative Board of Directors.*
- *Boston College High School, Trustee, 2017 to 2018, Associate Trustee, 2008 to 2012*
- *Saint Patrick's School, Board of Trustees, 2007 to 2014*
- *Roxbury Master Plan Strategic Oversight Committee, Member, 2005 to 2013*
- *Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON), Board Member, 2008 to 2012*
- *Center for Community Builders, Oakland, CA, Co-Chair, Steering Committee, 2001 to 2013*
- *Northeastern University Institute on Race and Justice, Community Advisory Board, Member, 2004 to 2012*
- *New Democracy Coalition, Member, Board of Directors, 2001 to 2011*
- *Cape Verdean Community UNIDO, Member, Board of Directors, 2000 to 2006*
- *The Partnership, Inc. Member, Board of Directors, 1997 to 2001*

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

As a teenage organizer involved in DSNi, then later as its Executive Director for more than a decade, I learned a lot about how to be both an effective leader and a grassroots organizer. To me, the biggest lesson I learned from DSNi was the importance and value of having a diverse set of community voices at the decision making table. Members of a community are best positioned to know the issues impacting their neighborhood and potential solutions to each issue. I have taken that lesson and those values with me into every role I have held, and I would continue to bring community voices to the table--and listen to these voices--as mayor of the City of Boston.

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

1. *The passion and work I, and many others through DSNi, have put into revitalizing the Dudley neighborhood through empowering residents. By working with the community, City Hall, and the private sector, I am proud to have led the acquisition of hundreds of vacant lots and conversion of 36 acres into 225 affordable homes, gardens, parks, playgrounds, schools, a community center, and a greenhouse. I also led a collaborative effort to win more than \$10M in Fed. grants to turn around the Orchard Gardens K-8, Dearborn Middle School, and Burke High School and establish the Dudley St. Neighborhood Charter School.*
2. *Serving as the City of Boston's first Chief of Economic Development. I am proud to have changed the way City Hall plans for growth and development, putting equity at the center of the economic agenda. We added 140,000 new jobs, while also investing millions of dollars in job training for local residents. I led the City's efforts to save small businesses and support their employees during COVID-19, directing more than \$20 million to local businesses in the form of direct grants and fees waived.*
3. *My biggest accomplishment in my life has been my marriage to my wife Tchintcia and raising four beautiful and smart children together. My family is the reason I am driven to public service--to make sure all families have equitable opportunities throughout our city.*

7. Are you a member of a union?

I am not a current union member. My father worked for many years at Plymouth Rubber Company and was a proud union member for many years. Many of my friends, neighbors, and colleagues are active members of unions throughout Greater Boston, and I've worked extensively with the labor community in support of issues impacting working people in our neighborhoods.

8. Please list any endorsements to date.

Four of the people whose support I am grateful for are Conan Harris, Rahn Dorsey, Paul English, and Joyce Linehan. Mr. Harris is the founder and co-principal of CJ Strategies, as well as the former Deputy Director of Public Safety under Mayor Walsh. Mr. Dorsey is the former Evaluation Director and Program Officer at the Barr Foundation, as well as the first Chief of Education at the City of Boston in Mayor Walsh's administration. Paul English is the founder of King Boston. Joyce Linehan served as Chief of Policy for the City of Boston from 2014-2021.

We also received Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley's Policy Pledge Distinction. Congresswoman Pressley is a pillar of transformative and progressive change, and I am honored to have received the Pressley Policy Pledge Distinction. I have worked closely with Congresswoman Pressley over the years on economic opportunity and racial justice issues. I look forward to partnering in the future as we continue our work to make Boston a more equitable and economically robust city.

I look forward to connecting with more groups and individuals across the city to earn their support. We are proud of our diverse coalition of support that we have built since announcing in early March, and we are looking forward to expanding the Team Barros community.

Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

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

I am a proud Democrat.

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

- *Gus Newport, former Mayor of Berkeley, CA and former Executive Director of DSNI: he is an advisor and has been a mentor around community engagement, sustainable housing, and intentional neighborhood development and investment for decades.*
- *Mel King: he has been a mentor and advisor, and has led the way on community organizing and advocacy.*
- *Stacey Abrams: her dedication to organizing and lifting up marginalized voices is inspiring, and she's unafraid to do the hard work that gets results.*

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

Yes, I think the City of Boston should have a discussion about term limits for the Mayor. I do recognize that the importance of consistency can be key, particularly when it comes to transformational initiatives like investment in our transportation infrastructure or housing policies and production. But incumbency in Boston is powerful. A term limit would incentivize more people who are passionate about public service to get involved and deepen our talented pool of civically engaged leaders and change makers. I think we have less participation in our civic municipal infrastructure because we don't have term limits.

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 am in favor of all of the above to increase voter turnout and participation in the city of Boston. I support fully bilingual ballots and absentee ballots for the top 10 most spoken languages in the city of Boston, and increasing access to voting by increasing the opportunities for early voting and voting by mail.

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

I think it needs to be simplified so it doesn't hinder voter turnout or access.

Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

1. What is your top priority if elected?

As Mayor, my top priority will be to urgently provide more safe, stable, high-quality affordable homes for Bostonians in every neighborhood and every income level. From an early age, I appreciated how much it meant for my parents, who immigrated from Cabo Verde, to purchase their own home and build a stable financial foundation that allowed us to stay in our neighborhood surrounded by family.

Housing is the foundation for community resilience, has a direct correlation to academic success, and is the top social determinant for health incomes. As Mayor, I will make sure Boston is a city that creates opportunities for all our residents to stay and thrive here, and build on the City's homeownership programs and mortgage products so more people have access to the stability that homeownership brings, and to help Black and Brown families build wealth. Housing is also a key component in preparing for and combating the impacts of climate change, and as Mayor I will prioritize providing the tools and resources to retrofit existing stock, invest in renewable energy, and set clear benchmarks and requirements on emissions for all new development.

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

In late July I released [my detailed plan](#) to reimagine policing and community safety in Boston. As Mayor, I'll tackle the root causes of violence by creating better opportunities for people in all of Boston's neighborhoods, creating summer learning and working opportunities for Boston's youth, and embracing early-stage intervention for high-risk youth. I'll also take immediate

action to address trauma and cycles of violence by creating a new non-law enforcement "Safe and Healthy Communities Agency" to respond to mental health issues, public health issues, and behavioral issues in schools. This action will free up police to focus on their most important job: preventing and solving violent crimes.

As a young man growing up in Roxbury, I witnessed the devastating impacts that drugs and violence had on my community, and dedicated myself to fixing these issues by creating positive opportunities for people in my community. I intend to continue that work for every resident as Mayor of Boston.

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

The BPDA must be reformed to lead with intentional and transparent neighborhood planning. It is important to me that community members lead efforts to develop their neighborhood. As Mayor, I will reform the BPDA by creating a new organizational structure that makes planning the lead unit in the agency, increase the number of planning staff, and invest resources to deepen the public engagement process to make sure it's accessible and culturally competent. I will build on successful planning efforts, such as those in Uphams Corner and Nubian Square that have created local neighborhood decision-making processes led by residents. Through this structure, neighborhood planning will dictate development. Right now, neighborhood development falls most often to an abutters fight. With more planning staff capacity and staff for community engagement, there will be a better notification process, more transparency, and community input. With a clear hierarchy, the development side will receive most stability, long-term planning guidelines, and an expedited and transparent review process.

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

I'm support that people hired by the municipal government should live in the city of Boston. If people serving the city live in the communities they are serving, there is better community engagement, delivery of services, and a deeper and shared experience with the residents they serve.

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 institution that means a lot to me, has untapped potential, and was a central part of my work as Chief of Economic Development that I intend to continue as Mayor.

As co-chair of Imagine Boston 2030, I included Arts Innovation Districts in the comprehensive citywide plan, beginning with Uphams Corner. We launched the Upham's Corner implementation process in the fall of 2017 to be a realization of the community's long-time vision to be an Arts and Innovation District, which will be anchored by a fully reimagined and activated Strand Theatre, and a \$18 million investment in a new library branch. The City of Boston and the BPDA collaborated to release an RFP for an independent operator to take over management and programming of the Strand, and to reimagine the theater as a not just a

performance venue, but a place to create art, collaborate, and foster creativity and homegrown artistic talents. The Strand should be a performance venue for the region, but also have art and music studio space that can be rented out to local artists and performers. A separate operator will have the staffing and budget to help the Strand fulfill its potential, while the City of Boston can focus on marketing the asset and attracting more patrons, and work with the neighborhood to continue plans to create more affordable artist and commercial space, as well as more mixed housing and neighborhood amenities. Once the redesign is complete, we can begin to build more housing on top of the Strand and implementing the holistic neighborhood enhancement that has been the result of many residents and many years of hard work and collaboration.

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

I believe there should be a vaccination mandate for everyone, including students. If they do not want to get vaccinated or are not old enough, I believe the City of Boston should provide free testing to keep individuals and the public safe. We cannot take our foot off the gas to get residents fully vaccinated.

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

As a former Boston School Committee member, I know how important it is to have diverse voices at the table when critical decisions are being made about our schools and our children. As Mayor, I will lead an inclusive discussion with all stakeholders to consider how a hybrid Committee could ensure geographic and racial representation of the BPS community.

To increase democracy and participation, I will establish permanent subcommittees that would include students, parents, and other community representatives to sit on committees that might include budget, academic program, community engagement, and educational equity committees.

Additionally, I will support the appointment of at least one additional student seat to the Boston School Committee. Student Committee members should be voting members and afforded the same or more resources than their adult peers, as appropriate, to perform their duties. These are important conversations we need to have together as a community.

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?

A person's education can be a deciding factor in life--I know it was for me. Every student, in every neighborhood, deserves access to a world-class education that meets their needs from birth to college to career, along with the support that is needed for them to succeed. Yes, we should consider socioeconomic factors for setting up all students for success. I believe effectively implementing individualized educational plans and additional in and out of school support has the ability to transcend socioeconomic status. The Boston Public Schools system

should recognize all students and where they are academically in order to help them grow to the next stage. That also means serving all students who have the talent, ambition, and drive for success at our more rigorous exam schools. As a parent of four young children, and the spouse of a BLS alumna, I understand that every parent wants their children to receive the best public education possible. However, I believe that BPS and the Boston School Committee should now push to spend as much time and energy on how we improve and the other schools in our district. Every neighborhood, every child deserves a quality school and education that helps them prepare to be successful in life and career.

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 begin a nationwide search in November for the next permanent Commissioner of the Boston Police Department that will engage community members and stakeholders. Any candidate seeking the role must have a track record of commitment to community policing, diversity throughout the ranks to reflect the communities they serve and protect, and be committed to rebuilding trust and transparency between the BPD and residents to ensure safety and respect for all.

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

Yes. As Chief of Economic Development, I'm proud of the Walsh Administration's plans to reimagine City Hall Plaza into a welcoming, active destination for residents' use, enjoyment, and pride.

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 resilience in the city of Boston?

I believe Climate Ready Boston is the right approach to prepare our city for the impacts of climate change, and appreciate each neighborhoods' and resident's specific concerns. However, I believe the program needs more staff capacity to study and implement strategies at a quicker pace, and more funding for deeper community engagement. Because so much of the Climate Ready Boston and Resilient Boston Harbor work and funding is heavily dependent on our relationship with the state and federal agencies, I plan to explore appointing a Special Advisor on Climate Resilience that would report directly to me, elevate and hold the program accountable, and coordinate between all agencies to ensure speedy implementation.

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 support.

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

Yes. I fully support Attorney General Maura Healey's lawsuit against gig economy companies that claim that their workers are not employees. I will oppose efforts by app-based employers to amend our laws to evade their obligations to their workers. I believe app-based employees have the right to organize under existing Massachusetts law and will support efforts to strengthen those rights.

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 successfully led the effort to get the City to commit to at least 25% of public contracts (representing approximately \$170-\$180 million) going to businesses owned by women and people of color every year. But it will only succeed if we have the right person in the mayor's office to continue the progress we have made so far. [I have a plan](#) to break up large contracts into smaller ones, so that they are more accessible to businesses owned by women and people of color and establish a fund to provide working capital for MWBEs looking to contract with the City. I would also lower the bonding and insurance requirements for contracts as well as shorten the length of time it takes the City to reimburse on public contracts. I would push to award more discretionary contracts by asking the state legislature to raise the award threshold and provide technical assistance so that MWBEs can be more competitive. I will also assess the contracts awarded and availability of bids annually in order to set new City's goals for the percentage of City contracts going to people of color and women, with specific goals for Black-owned businesses.

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 of the Housing Boston 2030 plan, 69,000 new units of housing was appropriate for our projected population growth. However, as Boston's population and economy grew faster than initially projected over the last seven years (and I would argue over the last few decades), and unfortunately our housing production didn't keep up. This has led to lower available stock, increased demand, and a cycle of rent increases.

I've spent my career creating new housing opportunities and building new units of housing throughout Boston at levels that Bostonians can actually afford. During my time as Chief of Economic Development, the City of Boston dramatically increased the production of new housing, and produced more affordable housing than any other time in Boston's history. This led to more jobs, economic growth, and funds to produce more housing that is truly affordable for the families and residents who need it the most. I'm currently the only candidate with the

right [plan](#) to do even more to create economic growth and develop our city without displacing residents.

It is critical that Boston maintains a supply of available housing at all levels of affordability, from deeply affordable to market rate and above that will provide stable, high-quality units, and make homeownership more attainable for families who want to stay in Boston and those that want to build wealth. I will increase housing production in Boston in order to keep up with demand and stabilize rents and housing costs while dedicating more City resources for affordable homes and public housing options, including more affordable housing for seniors and people with disabilities.

I will use more City-owned land for affordable homes, and also call on the State and Federal governments to contribute more to housing affordability in Boston. I will leverage City-owned buildings to create housing adjacent to libraries, community centers, and other public assets. I will acquire abandoned or underutilized properties in our neighborhoods and work with local communities to build affordable housing that meet the needs of that neighborhood. I will mandate that all City sponsored affordable housing developments use a local AMI (“area median income”) framework so residents have a way of understanding if the proposed homes are affordable to them and their neighbors.

As Mayor, I will create a fund that supports the acquisition of land and creation of affordable housing by community land trusts. Land trusts are one of several strategies to improve housing affordability for low-income families and people of color. They also give communities greater ownership stake over the future of their neighborhoods. As Executive Director I organized residents to make sure we had a blueprint for the neighborhood we wanted to create. I worked closely with the City and BPDA to use tools like eminent domain and 121A. And then brought developers to the table who aligned with our vision and could help make this neighborhood a reality.

Through a community driven approach, leveraging available tools and resources, I believe that together we can continue to grow our city with responsible and sustainable development without displacement.

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.

I’m proud to have served in the Walsh Administration for seven years as Boston’s first-ever Chief of Economic Development, and believe we deserve a high grade. During my seven years in that role, Boston’s economy grew and I made sure that growth was inclusive. We helped to create 140,000 new jobs, increased revenue by millions for job training for local residents, and created real opportunities for women, people of color, immigrants, and veterans. Prior to COVID, we were able to bring the unemployment rate down to an average of 2.4%.

I’m also very proud of our responsible fiscal management which produced AAA bond ratings and historic community investment. This was part of the reason Boston was named the city best positioned to withstand recession and the city best positioned to recover from COVID. But

that strong financial position also allowed us to implement transformative, systemic change across the city. We built new programs that provided real help to small businesses, set legal and meaningful procurement goals to further equitable contracting, and helped the Boston business community see how diversity strengthens business. I'm also proud to have co-created the city's Health Inequities Task Force, built state-of-the-art schools for students, increased programming for arts and culture and permanently embedded arts into City Hall operations, and made sure the nascent cannabis industry grew in an equitable way with the support of a new Boston Cannabis Board and Office of Emerging Industries to provide technical assistance to entrepreneurs and support growth.

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.

I give a grade of "needs serious improvement." At such an unprecedented and critical time, residents deserve a Mayor who values and practices transparency, leadership, inclusiveness, and long-term planning to ensure equity and sustainability for residents, our systems, and our economy. That being said, I am pleased to see that acting Mayor Janey is continuing a number of the programs I created and implemented, from procurement to workforce development to small business support, and am flattered that she plans to pilot a new approach to police and public safety that I proposed earlier in my campaign.

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

We need to make sure ZBA members truly represent the interests of Boston's neighborhoods and residents, and are free of conflicts of interest. We are going to protect against overdevelopment.

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

Right now free time is hard to find, but when I can it's with my family. Right now playing basketball or going to the park with my four kids help me unwind. I'm lucky to have such a wonderful partner in my wife Tchintcia, and we do start the day together by having breakfast as a family and splitting up who drives which children to summer camps, so that's more time together too. Also, it's a nice escape to spend time with my three boys as they practice their instruments.

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

I'm excited to see so many candidates seeking a seat on Boston's City Council, and I've enjoyed getting to know many of them on the campaign trail. I think Boston voters are the beneficiaries of so many dedicated public servants. I haven't made any decisions yet but will examine their policy positions close to September 14.

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.