

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?

Name: John FitzGerald

Age: 41

Place of Birth: Boston, MA

Address: 88 Oakton Ave, Boston, MA 02122

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

I have worked for 17 years at Boston City Hall, serving in a variety of capacities, including:

- Deputy Director of Imagine Boston 2030
- Director of Finance for the Office of Economic Development
- Deputy Director of Operations for the BPDA (current position)

3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.

I graduated from Boston Latin School. Following high school, I attended Northeastern University, earning my bachelor's Degree in Communications and eventually my Executive MBA.

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

- Coaching Dorchester Little League, Neponset flag football, and Dorchester soccer
- Team Fitz: Pan-Mass Challenge
- Cedar Grove Civic Association
- Popes Hill Civic Association

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

What has most prepared me is my 17+ years of experience in public service working at Boston City Hall. I know the building inside and out, I

understand how it works, and I know how to make it work for the people of District 3.

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

First and foremost would be my three kids, Callan, Mac, and Reese. Being their dad is the greatest thing I have and will ever do. They are a big part of what inspired me to get into this race in the first place, wanting to ensure we create a community where they, and all other kids in District 3, have the chance to grow and thrive.

Second, my work with Team Fitz and the Pan-Mass Challenge, a group we started honoring my dad, Kevin Fitzgerald, after his death from sarcoma cancer in 2007. Since its inception, we have raised over 1.5 million dollars for the Jimmy Fund and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute's tireless commitment to finding a cure.

Third, my work as Deputy Director of Imagine Boston 2030. It was truly amazing to have the chance to play a role in the first city-wide plan in over 50 years and see the impact of our work to increase access to economic opportunity, reduce displacement, build more housing, invest in our parks, and more.

7. Are you a member of a union?

I am not currently a union member.

8. Please list any endorsements to date.

Elected Officials, Former Elected Officials, Community Leaders:

Former Boston Mayor and Labor Secretary Marty Walsh, Boston City Councilor Frank Baker, Former Boston City Councilor Maureen Feeney, Boston City Council President Ed Flynn, Alfreda Harris.

Labor Unions: Greater Boston Labor Council, North Atlantic Regional Council of Carpenters, Iron Workers Local 7, Laborers' Local 223, IBEW Local 103, AFSCME Council 93, Sprinkler Fitters Local 550, Bricklayers Local 3, Sheetmetal Workers Local 17, IBEW Local 2222, Massachusetts Nurses Association, Elevator Operators Local 4, United Steelworkers District 4, Painters And Allied Trades DC 35, Operating Engineers Local 150.

Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

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

I am a proud, lifelong Democrat.

As for ideology, I don't pay attention to labels. It seems we often force people to choose between two options, and you have to be fully subscribed to one side or the other, I simply don't think that has to be the case, nor does it actually benefit anyone in the long run. If people want to make their own determination for where I fall on the ideological spectrum, they can look at my website, the campaign lit I have given out, or read my answers to questions.

What I am focused on is working with everyone, bringing people together, and ensuring we are actually getting things done. That is not happening on the council right now, and I think a reason for that is this mentality that one side must be pitted against another.

If we keep that up and refuse to work together to find a compromise, we are only going to continue to fail our constituents.

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

This is an easy one for me as I grew up having the unique experience of also being able to call my political role model Dad. Growing up and watching my father, Kevin FitzGerald, who served as a Massachusetts State Representative for almost 30 years, work tirelessly day and night to help the people in his community and beyond is the inspiration I draw from every day out there on the campaign trail. He did an amazing job as an elected, and that only pales in comparison to the job he did as my Dad. I miss him every day and hope I can make him proud.

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

I do not support term limits. I think the decision of who serves in what office and for how long should be left up to the voters. I also believe that the longer someone serves, the more knowledge they acquire and the better they can deliver results for their community.

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 think it is incumbent on us to do all we can to increase voter turnout and participation across the city. I am wholeheartedly in favor of mail-in voting and would support measures to add same-day registration options. In terms of combining local and federal elections on the same date, I would be willing to explore that possibility if we think it could drastically increase

turnout, but my concern would be that the public's focus would be more on the national election or state-wide elections, and, therefore, they may not be able to vet their local candidates and wholly consider their options.

Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

1. What is your top priority if elected?

Dorchester is an incredible place to call home; it is a close-knit community where neighbors help neighbors and where everyone looks out for one another. It is these values that made my wife Meghan, a public school teacher, and I decide to raise our kids here and make this community our home.

Over the last few years, however, it's become harder for many of us to continue to stay here due to a number of issues, including the rising cost of housing and quality public school choices for our children.

I am invested in this community and decided to raise my family here. I am running for City Council because I want to make it easier for other families to do the same.

I have spent the past 17 years working at Boston City Hall, and I know the building inside and out. I know how it works, and more importantly, I know how to make it work for you and for our community.

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

First and foremost, we have too many guns on our streets and need to work with our police officers to deal with this issue and crack down on illegal firearms. At the same time, we need to be partnering with community organizations that will help get to the root cause of the violence. Both are necessary if we ever want to see lasting progress made here.

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

One thing I often hear from residents in the community is their frustration with the ISD process as I am out in the community and talking to residents. They talk a lot about how, even when they are looking to do even simple updates or small projects to their homes, the process of getting approval can be cumbersome and painstaking.

I would like us to work on creating a more tangible roadmap for residents seeking minor modifications. At the same time, I think we need to look at the bigger picture and explore ways to see how we can encourage and assist homeowners interested in expanding their homes in the form of ADUs, which can add some much-needed housing units to the existing stock.

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

I would, of course, like to see City employees remain living in our city. Still, many factors, such as the cost of housing, lack of quality schools, and more, can make that untenable for some and lead to issues with finding quality new hires.

While I would be willing to explore changes to the 10-year residency requirement, first and foremost, I would like us to work to address the issues preventing people from staying in or choosing to relocate to Boston in the first place. This means working to build new affordable housing and creating better paths to homeownership, investing in our public schools so they can be confident their kids are receiving the education they deserve, and also working to increase their wages and ensure they are receiving appropriate annual COLA increases so they can afford to stay in Boston.

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

I am not in favor of an elected School Committee, especially at a time when we need to be working to stabilize and support the Boston Public Schools. There is a reason that, as a City, we changed from an elected to an appointed model over 30 years ago, and it is because the former model was not working for our system, teachers, parents, and their kids.

I think we need to take politics out of our schools, not add more in.

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?

Population growth can bring economic benefits and vibrancy to our communities. However, while having ambitious goals for our city's growth is good, we must also acknowledge that achieving this target should not come at the expense of displacing long-standing residents or

compromising the character and cultural diversity of our neighborhoods like Dorchester and Mattapan.

To deal with our shortage of affordable housing, we first need to plan, then build, for the realities of our residents. This means pushing for all types of housing development, focusing on affordability to ensure everyone, regardless of their income, has increased access to the market.

In addition, understanding that homeownership offers families the most significant housing security and helps build generational wealth, I would work to increase investments in our first-time home buyer programs. This would give the opportunity to first-time buyers, many of whom would not be able to purchase their first homes, the chance to do so by qualifying to make a below-average down payment upon purchase and lower their monthly mortgage rates.

7. What is your position on rent control?

There is no question that the lack of affordable housing and the skyrocketing cost of rent is a problem that needs to be addressed, but I do not think rent control is the best solution.

While rent control can help bring down displacements, it can also lead to disinvestment and less housing being built, increasing the cost of rent in the long run.

A study done a few years ago at Stanford University, looking at rent control in San Francisco, found that while the policy did lower displacement, it also led to a 15% drop in available housing after a few years because as Landlords began selling their apartments to owner-occupants and many stopped building new units. So, the lost rental housing supply likely drove up market rents in the long run, ultimately undermining the law's goals.

I do think there are other things we can do to help deal with these issues, such as offering rent subsidies to lower-income individuals and families, fixing our zoning laws that prevent new multi-unit housing in many places, and offering greater incentives to property owners who designate a higher percentage of units to affordable 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)?

As a current BPDA employee, I do not feel it is appropriate for me to comment on this issue while it is ongoing and I am still working at the agency.

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?

The Covid pandemic was undoubtedly a challenging period for all of us. It highlighted the importance of preparedness, collaboration, and proactive decision-making in managing public health crises. In terms of lessons learned and things we need to do to be ready should another situation arise:

Preparedness: We must prioritize investing in robust preparation strategies, including early detection, testing capabilities, and sufficient stockpiles of essential medical supplies. By strengthening our readiness, we can minimize disruptions and respond more effectively to future health emergencies.

Collaboration: The pandemic demonstrated the significance of cooperation between various stakeholders, including government agencies, healthcare providers, community organizations, and citizens themselves. Building strong partnerships will ensure a coordinated response that leaves no one behind.

Equity: The pandemic disproportionately affected vulnerable communities with limited access to healthcare resources. We must address these inequities head-on by implementing policies that ensure equal access to quality healthcare services for all residents.

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 current administration a passing grade, but think we have a lot more work to do

I think we have seen a lot of good that has been done over the last two years, such as the administration's work to make public transit more affordable and housing our homeless population. I also consistently hear from residents about the quick response they get when utilizing 311 to access much-needed city services.

At the same time, there is still much to be done to deal with the housing crisis, turning around our public schools, and especially the urgent crisis we see on Mass and Cass.

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?

Public transportation is a critical part of any city's infrastructure. I bought my first car only 2-3 years ago, out of necessity, when my wife and I welcomed our third child. Before that, and for most of my life, I have relied on the MBTA. Unfortunately, as we have all seen over the last several years, our current system is consistently on the brink of collapse. If elected, I would work with members of our state and federal delegations, along with the MBTA, to ensure we are securing the funding necessary to create a transportation system that is truly reliable and accessible to everyone. I was happy to see that Boston will now get a seat at the table officially.

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

Our city infrastructure is in desperate need of attention. If elected, I will ensure we are taking steps to both improve existing infrastructure and invest in new projects that will benefit everyone. That means working to ensure that our streets are repaired, which they greatly need, and consistently cleaned and maintained. I want us to get out of the practice of only fixing problems once they have reached a critical point, which often creates difficulties for residents. Instead, we must work to ensure we are consistently responding to and dealing with issues as they arise.

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

We need to take steps to make our city safer for pedestrians. I firmly believe every resident should feel safe and secure while walking in our city, whether to work, school, or simply enjoy the community. I would invest in better sidewalks, crosswalks, and lighting systems. By improving these essential elements of our urban landscape, we can create an environment that encourages walking and ensures pedestrian safety.

We need to take a balanced and community-centered approach regarding bike lanes. While bike lanes provide an eco-friendly and healthy alternative for commuting, we also recognize the concerns residents and local businesses have raised about potential negative impacts on parking availability and traffic flow.

My approach will be simple: finding the right balance. We should work closely with communities, businesses, and transportation experts to identify suitable locations for bike lane implementation that minimize disruptions while maximizing benefits. By conducting thorough studies and engaging in open dialogue with all stakeholders, we can ensure that our decisions are based on data-driven insights and community input. I much

prefer bike trails, akin to the Southwest Corridor, for bike utilization as opposed to blending bikes and cars, and I think we should look at where we can continue to patch together trails throughout the City for universal access.

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

The campaign trail keeps me busy, and finding time to unwind can be difficult but also essential. For me, it's spending every available moment I have with my family. I especially enjoy coaching my son Callan's youth sports teams or building things with my son Mac before Reese comes barreling in and knocks it all down.

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.