

## 2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

### Section 1: BACKGROUND

1. What is your name, age, place of birth and present address?
  - a. Julia Mejia, 51, I was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to Boston when I was 5 years old. I live at 48 Capen St in Dorchester.
2. What is your present occupation? Also, please note any past employment that may be relevant to your candidacy.
  - a. I am currently your Boston City Councilor At-Large. After college, I moved to New York to work as a producer and on air talent on MTV. I ultimately decided to move back to Boston and return to my roots as a community activist, founding CPLAN, a city-wide parent advocacy group, and Determined Divas, a volunteer-led civic engagement for women of color.
3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.
  - a. I dropped out of high school, ultimately returning to get my high school diploma after being inspired by a speech by the Rev. Liz Walker. I am the first in my family to graduate from both high school and college, when I graduated from Mt. Ida College. Education was my family's pathway out of poverty, that's why I have been a strong advocate for education at all levels. On the council, I have led in filing an ordinance to establish a Literacy Taskforce, so we can monitor where people need help and provide them with the education assistance they need.
4. Please list some of your affiliations with non-profits, civic associations and political groups.
  - a. Aside from the organizations I founded, I have worked with many organizations across Boston. In addition, our office has let many organizations lead our policy decisions because we believe we are a megaphone for the ideas of every Bostonian, because #allmeansALL. Some organizations I have been affiliated with, endorsed by or have worked with in my office are: Amplify Latinx, Right to the City Vote, BEJA, Black Boston COVID Coalition, Boston Main Streets, Lawyers for Civil Rights, ACLU, NAACP, SIM, NUBE, Chica Project, the Dominican Women's Development, Mijente, Chinese Progressives, It's Lit Boston, Teen Empowerment, City Life, Voices of Liberation, BECMA, Jobs with Justice, Bread for Boston, Good Jobs for Boston Coalition, Boston Economic Justice Institute, Dunk the Vote, Violence in Boston, New England United 4 Justice, Neighborhood Civic Association Groups, Essential Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter, Progressive Mass and its local chapters, Cape Veridian Association of Boston.
5. What in your experience to date will most help you to be an effective leader?
  - a. My lived experience is similar to so many in Boston that have never had a voice. I moved to Boston when I was 5 years old. I did not speak English but soon found myself as a translator for my mother and so many in my community as they tried to navigate the services that were available to them. I took that experience into

City Hall when we initiated our Language Access Ordinance, to open City Hall up to all, because #allmeansALL. That's also why our office intentionally steps back and lets our community lead and amplify their voices. We passed our Residential Kitchen Ordinance which was led by community members as well.

6. What are the three accomplishments you're most proud of?
  - a. My biggest accomplishments are all focused on breaking cycles of poverty, systemic injustices and activating those left out of the political process.
    - i. My biggest personal accomplishment was being the first in my family to graduate high school and college. My education was the pathway for my family to break our cycle of poverty. After graduating I was able to get my mother out of Section 8 housing, and purchase a home for my mother and my beautiful daughter to provide stability and love.
    - ii. Pre-council, I am most proud of moving back to Boston to work in community organizing. I had spent a number of years at MTV as a producer and changed the way they did business and forced them to focus on stories of everyday struggles, particularly those felt in lower income communities. That experience taught me my pathway in life – that in my heart I am a community organizer and activist and I had to return to Boston to use my voice to help those in need. Once back in Boston, I was able to found my own organization CPLAN, which has done tremendous work for all parents and students in Boston.
    - iii. I took both these experiences to City Hall with me and opened my office up to the community. It really is OUR office, we do not dictate policy to the community, but rather engage the community and activate those left out of the process. Our office has led on initiatives that have had an immediate impact in improving the lives of those struggling. Whether it was raising \$500,000 to provide culturally competent food and care during COVID, our Language Access and Retail Residential Kitchen Ordinances to provide pathways to all residents, or holding the city accountable through our work in hearings, it is all aimed at improving people's lives today.
7. Are you a member of a union?
  - a. No, but I am a proud and strong advocate for all workers and unions.
8. Please list any endorsements to date.
  - a. State Senator Sonia Chang Diaz, State Rep Liz Miranda, State Rep Nika Elugardo, State Rep Russell Holmes, Former State Rep Charlotte Golar Richie, Boston Teachers Union, Massachusetts Nurses Association, UFCW 1445, Sunrise Movement, Sierra Club, JP Progressives, West Rox/Roz Progressives, MassNOW, Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus, Boston Ward 4 Democratic Committee, Elect Black Women PAC, Education Activist Sung-Joon Pai

## Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

1. What is your party affiliation and how would you characterize your political ideology?
  - a. I am a Democrat, and I would characterize my political ideology as #allmeansALL because I believe we are stronger when we let people in, open dialogue and work for the betterment of everyone.
2. Please name up to three (and at least one) of your political role models? Please feel free to explain your choices.
  - a. Our Congresswoman and sister in service Ayanna Pressley. I worked hard as a volunteer on her campaign and announced my candidacy for City Council the day after she won her election. She taught me that I do not need to ask permission to be myself and to fight for what I believe in.
  - b. Before Congresswoman Pressley, there was former Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm. She is unbought and unbossed. Her famous quote "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair" informs the work I do every day to bring more people to the table. Because nothing about us, without us, is for us.
  - c. Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. The next generation of the legacy of Congresswoman Pressley and Congresswoman Chisholm, AOC did not wait her turn or ask permission. Her leadership at a younger age and her commitment to her ideals was a driving force for me in my first race and a role model for so many youth which is so important to me.
3. Are you in favor of term limits for the seat you are seeking? If so, how many terms?
  - a. I am against term limits because if we have a more substantial civic engagement infrastructure we would be better fit to choose when an incumbent's time has come for them to be voted out. Two years in your first term is not enough to do what we need to do.
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?
  - a. I am proud that our office has led and filed the Home Rule Petition resolution to lower the voting age to 16 years old. I favor all forms of improvements to allow for people to vote. We can improve voter turnout in several ways – one is meeting people where they are at. That's why you will see me in hair salons, barbershops, bodegas and bus stations throughout the year, because we need to engage people in their own communities. Another way to make voting more accessible is through language access and options like same-day voter registration, mail in voting and early voting. Finally, people will vote when they feel like they are a part of the process, so we need to ensure that we engage as many residents as possible, particularly youth, and elect candidates that everyone can see themselves in.
5. Do you think that Boston should adopt a rank-choice voting system in upcoming election cycles?
  - a. Yes, it will make for a more diverse field of candidates.

### Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

1. What is your top priority if elected?
  - a. When we are reelected, our top priorities will be to focus on education, economic empowerment, and planning and development. Our top priority is designing a type of government that doesn't see people as obstacles to the work, but is determined to center them in every decision making process. That's something we've led on in our first term---we've created space for constituents by holding youth-led town halls, co-designed policy solutions by people closest to the issues, and have fought to ensure that our city is more responsive to people who speak languages other than English through our language access ordinance.
2. How will you approach the issue of gun violence in our communities?
  - a. We need to look back at and learn from the lessons taken from the Boston Miracle in the 1990s. We knew back then that the best ways to address violence on our streets is through mental health services, job preparedness trainings, and putting a stop to the school-to-prison pipeline. At the same time, we need to look at our systems of accountability and make serious changes. In our city, since 2007, Boston police have made an arrest in nearly 90 percent of the homicides with white victims but only in 42 percent of the homicides with black victims, who account for the vast majority of the city's killings. We need serious reforms in our police department to hold them accountable to the disparities we are seeing get played out every day out on these streets. That is why we passed a civilian review board and have continued to hold the BPD accountable to the inequities in their system.
3. Is there a specific city agency you see as in need of urgent reform? If so, please explain.
  - a. IMO every single department needs urgent reform because our system was designed from the ground up to privilege access to city services to a select few elite members of our society. From housing to police to parks, we need to completely reimagine the way we do business in the city of Boston because everyday we are seeing a system taking positions about us, without us. If there were one department we should be prioritizing above all else, it should be the BPDA and the ZBA. That's why we formed a steering committee on planning and development and filed our hearing order on the IAG process, because the longer we wait on reforms to our housing and planning/development systems, the more people from our communities are going to be priced out.
4. What is your position on residency, i.e. requiring people hired by the municipal government to live in the city of Boston?
  - a. It is kind of unfair that we pay people so little to work for the city but then expect them to pay Boston prices just to stay here. I support a residency requirement and we need to make sure that the salaries at which we hire are commensurate with the living expenses in our city.
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?

- a. For a lot of people, creative outlets are the only kind of therapy they can afford. We've seen that firsthand through our art nights throughout COVID, where we hired an art therapist to engage Black and Brown residents through an artistic medium to address their emotions and sentiments during the times of the pandemic. In short, art is a form of therapy, and we should be using this tremendous asset, the Strand, as a means to engage with communities in a way that taps into their creative minds in order to help them address the systems of the world around them.
6. What is your position on vaccinations? Should students be required to be vaccinated for Covid-19 to attend school in Boston?
  - a. We need to be leading with safety and public health. There are people across Boston who are afraid because they want to get vaccinated but cannot because they are immuno-compromised. At the same time, we have people in our city who are hesitant to get vaccinated because of deep-rooted fears about the way public health has been prejudiced against them. We need to lead with all of these people in mind, and focus on making sure everyone who can get vaccinated receives a vaccine, working to break the stigma that so many people are experiencing. That is why I have partnered with the Boston Black COVID Coalition to register thousands of Bostonians, particularly in Black and Brown neighborhoods to get the vaccines. We need to commit to this work so that we can build up an immunity in order to protect those who cannot get vaccinated, including our school children under 12 years old.
7. Do you favor a return to an elected School Committee? Please explain.
  - a. I am proud to be one of only a few candidates to support returning to a fully elected school committee, and we have been working with education advocates across the city to take part in this fight. We've seen over the past year how a solely-appointed school committee is dramatically unrepresentative and unaccountable to the needs of their constituents. An elected school committee gives greater voice to the parents, students, and teachers of our school district to see the future of BPS placed in the hands of the people who are living the day-to-day realities.
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. I do support it to ensure access to the exam schools is equitable but I also believe we spend too much time on the exam schools. We need to ensure all schools can reach the level of excellence of those schools and currently they do not. I am focused on ensuring ALL students have access to that level of education.
9. Do you support the citywide ballot question that would hand new budgetary powers to the City Council?
  - a. Yes, I absolutely support this measure and have voiced my support for it in the past. But most importantly, this isn't about giving the Council the power, it's about

placing that power in the hands of the people. This isn't the Mayor's budget and it isn't the Council's budget, this is the People's Budget and we need to start treating it as such. In addition to supporting this ballot question, we also need to see how we can redesign our budget process to more greatly center the voices and lived experiences of the people. That is why we sponsored two budget hearing orders, one to examine how to improve our participatory budgeting process and another to examine a zero-based budget approach.

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?
  - a. Our next police commissioner needs to be willing to work with the City Council to implement much-needed reforms that seek to address the deep-rooted inequities in our police infrastructure, including fully implementing a permanent alternative for non-violent 911 emergencies, an ordinance which we sponsored last year. We also need a police commissioner that is willing to work around the blue wall of silence to ensure that police officers who are harmful to individuals or the community are not kept on the force. As for how the position should be selected, the Mayor needs to hold an open and transparent nomination process that centers the needs and the voices of the people.
11. Do you support the redevelopment of City Hall and City Hall Plaza?
  - a. City Hall and City Hall Plaza absolutely need to be redeveloped, but not because of beauty. The simple act of getting in and out of City Hall from the plaza is entirely inaccessible to a number of people, particularly persons with disabilities. The brick masonry of the plaza is spaced so far apart that it can catch white canes as they scrape across the ground. The doors in and out of City Hall are not automatic. We had an intern work for our office who used a Rollator Walker who had to be let in and out by a member of our staff because the doors are too heavy and not able to be opened at a push of a button. This is unacceptable and we need to update our public buildings so that everybody can access them.
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?
  - a. First, I think we need to reconsider the word "resiliency." Resiliency implies that we are simply prepared to weather the ongoing changes to our climate. We need to be putting our focus far more towards climate mitigation and actively undoing the damage we have caused to the planet. I support the findings of the Climate Ready Boston plan, but I think we need to take a serious look at the pace of implementation. For example, back in 2011, the City committed to an 80 percent reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. We are looking at a future where 2050 may be too late for a lot of these initiatives. We need to be making dramatic changes today, which is why I strongly support the current proposed updates to BERDO.

13. A millionaires tax is expected to be on the statewide ballot in 2022. How do you plan to vote?
  - a. I support the millionaires tax.
14. Should gig workers be considered company employees, rather than independent contractors?
  - a. They should be allowed to choose what is best for them. Being company employees would allow them to organize and be afforded the protections that classification gives, while others may prefer the autonomy that comes with being independent contractors.
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?
  - a. Over my 20 months on the Council, I asked the administration about this issue at every possible hearing. We need to get better at this. I support the goals that were set, and we've also been working towards closing the wealth gap through our Residential Kitchens ordinance, through holding developers accountable, and through building the capacity of our small 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?
  - a. I believe that everybody has a right to a home, and as long as we continue to develop exponentially without any plans to occupy these units with the people who need them most, we are going to continue the cycle of displacement we have been seeing since the days of urban renewal. We should be investing in public housing and more affordable units throughout the city and in every neighborhood. We also filed a hearing order on reparations specifically to look at ways to build generational wealth in Black communities across Boston in part through the housing market.
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.
  - a. D
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.
  - a. C
19. Will you seek to expand or change the composition of the Zoning Board of Appeals? If so, how?
  - a. We have formed a planning and development steering committee specifically to look at ways for the zoning board of appeals to be changed. While I believe in the long term we need to completely redo our zoning code and the people who enforce it, in the short term we need to create systems that allow ease of access to the ZBA for people other than wealthy developers who know how to game the system. Residents in Boston who are just looking to add a back deck to their homes who have never dealt with the ZBA before are often caught off-guard with

the difficult-to-understand procedures and are put through so much red tape that it is confusing and off-putting to them. We should be working to make sure that the services, information, and approval of the ZBA is easy to understand, digitally accessible beyond the pandemic, and available in languages other than English.

20. When not on the campaign trail, how do you unwind?
  - a. I soak up the sun and spend whatever little time with my daughter and my little dog, Toby.
21. If you were not a candidate, who would you support in this election for either Mayor or City Council?
  - a. I'm still doing my research.

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 Fri. Aug. 8, 2021.