

# 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?

Michael F. Flaherty, 52, Boston MA, and 1726 Columbia Road, South Boston

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

Current Boston City Councilor At-Large running for re-election. Practicing attorney that previously served as an Assistant District Attorney for Suffolk County and former card-carrying member of Teamsters Local #25

3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.

Attended Boston College High School, Boston College, and Boston University School of Law.

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

Board of Directors of Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) (2000-present), Harvard Kennedy School Taubman Center for State and Local Government Advisory Board Member (2008-2018), Member of South Boston Citizens Association (1991-present), Ward 6 Democratic Committee Member, Urban League of Eastern MA, Boston Year 13

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

As a result of my tenure on the Boston City Council, I have a deep understanding and knowledge of the issues impacting each neighborhood and a proven track record of truly being a citywide elected official who represents every neighborhood and stakeholder group. My record on issues including the Community Preservation Act, marriage equality and an elected school committee show that I am not afraid to make the hard decisions required for an effective leader and representative for every resident of Boston.

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

1 - Last year I was able to help launch the Boston Year 13 pilot program in partnership with non-profit Digital Ready and with support from Wentworth Institute of Technology and countless partners around the Greater Boston Area. In light of our opportunity and achievement gap in our Boston Public Schools,

have been advocating for the adoption of an optional Year 13 Program into the BPS. This “Year 13” would allow for students to have a one-year, intensive program that helps prepare them to transition into post-secondary education, vocational-technical schools and career. Given that Boston is home to some of the best colleges and universities in the country and the growing life sciences and STEM sectors, our students should have access to high paying opportunities happening in their own backyard. I felt so strongly about the need for a program like this that I supported this pilot year partnership to get the program off the ground without waiting for adoption by the BPS system as a whole. Last year’s inaugural cohort of 25 students was tremendously successful, even amidst the pandemic and the challenges that posed, and 23 of the students are now either set to begin pursuing higher education or are working good jobs directly in Boston’s innovation economy. Going forward, I would like to see BPS embrace the success of the program and adopt a version of it system-wide so that any student in Boston who feels they could benefit from this type of a program has access to one.

2 - I am proud of my efforts to help pass the Community Preservation Act (CPA). In 2001, when a citywide coalition first campaigned for the Community Preservation Act via a ballot initiative, I signed on as the first citywide elected official to support and champion for its passage in Boston and signed on again in 2016 as the lead sponsor to place it on the ballot. I understood then and continue to believe that residents need to be able to reap the benefits of growth in Boston. I am now chair of the Boston City Council’s Committee on the Community Preservation Act. Since the passage and implementation of the CPA in 2016, the CPA has secured over \$100 million in funding for affordable housing, open space and historic preservation projects. To date, we have awarded over \$92 million to 198 projects across Boston, with \$48,991,050 dedicated to 27 affordable housing initiatives, \$22,814,665 to 84 open space projects and \$20,965,414 to 87 historical preservation projects.

3- My work on affordable housing and job training programs. I am proud of my efforts to strengthen one of our City’s leading affordable housing and job training programs, linkage. My first hearing order as a City Councilor was to call for an increase in the linkage exaction fees, which at that time had not been done in 11 years, and as former chair of government operations, I played a critical role in passing legislation in 2019 that improved our linkage program, giving the City more local flexibility to update our exaction rate to be better aligned with the market in Boston and codify our Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP) into our zoning code. The linkage program has generated millions to support affordable housing and job training and in 2020 alone was expected to generate over \$43.2 million for affordable housing and over \$8.5 million to support job training programs.

7. Are you a member of a union?

While I am no longer an active member, I was a ten-year Teamster Local #25 where I worked my way through college and law school.

8. Please list any endorsements to date.

I am still actively seeking endorsements. To date, I have received endorsements from Teamsters Local Union #25, Boston Teachers Union, Boston Firefighters Local 718, SEIU NAGE Local 5000, Boston Police Superior Officers Federation, North Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1445, IBEW 2222, Boston Carmen's Union #589, The International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers Local 29, International Union of Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers Local 3, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 103, International Union of Elevator Constructors Local 4, International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers Local 6, International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers Local 7, Laborers' International Union of North America Local 22, Laborers' International Union of North America Local 88 (Tunnel Workers), Laborers' International Union of North America Local 151, Laborers' International Union of North America Local 223, Laborers' International Union of North America Local 1421 (Wreckers), International Union of Operating Engineers Local 4, International Union of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 35, United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States, Canada (UA) Pipefitters Local 537, Operative Plasterers' & Cement Masons' International Association Local 534, United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States, Canada (UA) Plumbers & Gasfitters Local 12, United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied Workers Local 33, Sheet Metal Workers' International Association Local 17, United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States, Canada (UA) Sprinkler Fitters Local 550.

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

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

I am a lifelong member of the Democratic Party and would characterize my political ideology as pragmatic, forward thinking and progressive. I pride myself as being a bridge builder and am less focused on political affiliations and ideologies and more focused on doing what it takes to effectively serve Bostonians. My track record of results speaks to the effectiveness of this approach. I am proud of being a leader on affordable housing, marriage equality and many other issues.

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

It is hard to pick just three political role models. I have to say that my father, State Representative and Judge Michael F. Flaherty Sr is my biggest role model. I grew up watching him make a career of helping people--getting people into treatment and recovery, getting young kids out of trouble, putting them into housing and quietly helping residents on a variety of issues. I've prioritized those issues in my own career. Two other role models would be the late Congressman Joe Moakley and former District Attorney Ralph Martin.

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 for City Councilor At-Large. I believe that our two-year terms provide opportunities for voters to make determinations about which candidates they want to continue leading our City. As an incumbent, I recognize the value of my experience and have gained an in-depth understanding of the needs of residents in each Boston neighborhood. I trust that Boston's voters can decide themselves when someone's time is up on the Council. We have seen a lot of turnover on the Council in recent years, which demonstrates that term limits are not necessary to get new ideas and perspectives on the Council.

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?

High voter turnout is imperative for a healthy democracy and is good for the future of our city. I support same-day voter registration, lowering the voting age to 16, early voting for municipal elections, and permanent mail-in voting.

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

I do not support ranked choice voting nor do I see a need for it in our municipal elections. Massachusetts voters rejected ranked choice voting this past year at the ballot box. In our municipal elections this year, Boston will have a preliminary election that will narrow 17 At-Large City Council candidates down to eight and a general election that will narrow eight candidates to four winners who take office. The recent New York City mayoral election demonstrates the flaws with ranked choice voting. There was a long delay in identifying which candidate won and many voters exhausted their ballot and did not rank five candidates.

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

1. What is your top priority if elected?

I am running for re-election to continue making Boston a better place to live, work, and raise a family. As such, my top priority is creating safe and truly

affordable housing by strengthening and expanding our affordable housing policies to better meet the needs of Bostonians. I believe that Boston's greatest days are ahead of us and that the current challenges, while urgent, are opportunities to bring Boston to new heights and make our city and region a more vibrant and equitable place for all residents. We are a city in transition, and I have the experience, institutional knowledge, and leadership skills to help guide this transition and continue to move Boston forward.

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

My approach to public safety has long been guided by my belief that we cannot arrest or prosecute our way out of crime and that we need to adopt a holistic approach that addresses the underlying factors that contribute to crime. That means providing residents with job training and employment opportunities, treatment and recovery services, trauma services and other support services that people need to thrive. In addition to employing a bias-free, data-driven approach to identifying individuals who are driving violence in our neighborhoods, we need to embrace our residents, community partners and leaders as the allies they are in this fight. Community oriented solutions, such as our Boston Police Department's community policing model and proactive interventions with community partners, such as Boston's clergy, street workers and public health workers absolutely need to be a part of a comprehensive plan to reduce gun violence.

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

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) is in need of urgent reform. While there have been improvements made in recent years and there is a pending home rule petition that would alter the processes and composition of the Board, the process can be opaque and confusing for residents and applicants alike. One of the aspects that is in most need of reform is the notification process for residents, particularly during the sometimes-lengthy deferral process for applicants. I find it extremely unfair to residents that applicants are not required to re-notify abutters about the deferral date, potentially robbing neighbors of the opportunity to weigh in on projects. Additionally, updating our local zoning codes to meet the needs of our City today and having a zoning board that upholds our local zoning code would provide for a clarified zoning and permitting process. I know that Boston can do better in making urban planning and economic growth mutually complementary, transparent and more sensitive to community concerns.

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

I am a strong proponent of residency requirements for City of Boston employees. I feel that Bostonians are best suited to fill Boston's jobs. It is important for employees who make decisions that impact Boston neighborhoods to have an in-depth understanding of the needs of stakeholders in our neighborhoods. I also think it's valuable for Boston to invest our tax dollars in city residents. To that point, I have a record of working with stakeholders to strengthen the compliance

standards for the Boston Residents Jobs Policy (BRJP), both for its residency component as well as its diversity components.

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 a historical, cultural and economic asset to not only the diverse Uphams Corner area, but our entire City. Residents, community leaders and stakeholders have put hours into the Uphams Corner plan and any programming should continue to be guided by that diverse community of stakeholders. The Strand should continue to be a hub for performance arts but should also be programmed as a central hub or incubator for other aspects of the creative economy, local businesses and civic groups in the area. Connecting the Uphams Corner library to the Strand theater is one example of an opportunity to activate both spaces.

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

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe, effective, and a critical part of our City's recovery from COVID-19. One of the strengths of Boston is our world-class medical community. I encourage residents to get vaccinated and to consult their primary care physician or local community health center with questions. Currently the CDC makes vaccines available to everyone 12 years and older, so making it a requirement to attend school in Boston is not feasible.

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

I have long been on record supporting the return to an elected school committee and giving the student representative a vote and stipend. Our School Committee members should be held accountable to our school system's end users: Boston's school children and their parents/guardians. While a hybrid committee may appeal to some as a compromise measure, I believe Boston voters can and should be trusted to exercise good judgement in the best interests of their children and grandchildren. Core to my belief in matters of improving Boston's public schools is greater autonomy and with it, greater accountability to parents and students.

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?

While the exam schools admissions process was under review, my biggest priority was ensuring that a bias-free exam remained in place to assess student preparedness and subject matter acumen while also ensuring greater access to our exam schools so that they reflect the diversity of our City. While I do not believe this final plan is perfect, I am thankful that the test has remained in place for SY 23-24 and beyond and that we are on the path towards increasing access to the schools. My goal as City Councilor has been to address the quality of education provided by our entire BPS system--not just three exam schools.

9. Do you support the citywide ballot question that would hand new budgetary powers to the City Council?

I voted in support of the creation of the ballot question to grant the Council greater powers over the city's budget. Councilors are duly elected representatives of Boston's residents who deserve greater influence over the budget that will determine outcomes for their constituents. As local elected officials, we attend community meetings, talking to stakeholders regularly and understand the needs of our constituents. Allowing for the expansion of the City's participatory budget process through this ballot question will create a more collaborative and open process for residents to engage in about where they want to see City funds spent.

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?

While the City is without a permanent Commissioner, we are in very capable hands with Dorchester's own Acting Commissioner and Superintendent-in-Chief, Gregory Long. The next Mayor should form a search committee with trusted community leaders, residents and law enforcement members to help guide a thorough search process. It's critical the next Commissioner is a leader that will continue to improve the Boston Police Department to meet the changing demands of 21st century policing. They should embrace our community policing efforts as well our efforts to create a more comprehensive, community oriented, and data driven public safety strategy that continues to build trust between the community and the department.

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

I believe the work currently being done to renovate City Hall Plaza will make it a vibrant, sustainable and welcoming place. While architecturally iconic, I personally think the City Hall building is in need of a refresh. The much-needed improvements to ADA accessibility, green infrastructure and civic space will allow City Hall plaza to be an efficient gathering place for civic engagement for decades to come.

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?

The Climate Ready Boston initiative was a great start and put Boston on the right path, but the global climate situation is always changing, and we need to continue to adapt our city's climate guidance in response. One of the most frequent complaints with regards to Climate Ready Boston, and other planning

done by the city and state, is that there is too much ‘studying’ and not enough action. To this end, the city and state are both slated to receive tens of millions of dollars in federal funding, with significant chunks earmarked for infrastructure improvements. This represents our opportunity to take the necessary action to put these plans into practice. The regular nuisance flooding of Morrissey Boulevard, and the corresponding studies into its potential replacement, are a prime example. The city and state are completing the prerequisite studies so that once the funding is available, we can hit the ground running and make those improvements.

During my time in office, I've led on a variety of environmental and climate change initiatives, including requiring all municipal buildings to comply with Net-Zero carbon standards, the passage of local ordinances that require more resilient development and calling for more green jobs training for our residents. I will continue to call on our City to implement aggressive targets to meet our climate action plan with an emphasis on environmental justice and equity. Some strategies include enforcing full compliance with our tiered net-zero carbon standard for all municipal buildings; the adoption of a zero-net carbon standard for City funded affordable housing; deeper investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy; and the creation of a carbon emissions performance standard. In addition to creating a carbon emissions performance standard for large buildings, the City could develop a strategy to retrofit and electrify buildings that won't be covered by this standard with an emphasis on equity.

Lastly, achieving our climate resiliency goals presents us with opportunities for new economic development and jobs for our residents. I fought to secure additional funding for green jobs training in our FY 22 budget, securing a total of \$4 million this year, and will continue to fight for expanded job training and workforce development opportunities for Boston residents. It's critical that residents from across our neighborhoods have opportunities to train and gain from the growth of green jobs. Two avenues where the City can lead on this is through job programming funded through our Office of Workforce Development and creating curriculum and internship opportunities in this sector in our Boston Public Schools.

13. A millionaires tax is expected to be on the statewide ballot in 2022. How do you plan to vote?

I support the Fair Share Amendment and expect to vote yes after learning more about the proposal. It has been my position that before we increase the tax burden to generate additional revenue, that we should do a top-to-bottom audit of how we spend money and eliminate duplicative or ineffective services and outlays of taxpayer monies. That said, as inequality continues to worsen, we need to move away from relying on regressive “user fees” and other revenue measures that disproportionately impact the state's lowest income residents and make sure our economy is working better for everyone.



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

I believe that participants in the so-called gig economy should be considered employees and importantly, should be able to organize into a labor union. Too many Big Tech companies are exploiting independent contractor laws to mistreat their employees, putting all of the costs onto the employee in order to maximize their own profits. As our economy evolves, our laws must evolve with it to ensure that workers have a right to organize. There is no better way for workers to get what they deserve than through collective bargaining and gig workers should not be excluded from that process.

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 played a leadership role in passing the City's ordinance on equity in procurement and contracts and I am disappointed by our shortcomings in this area, especially considering our diverse network of Black or Latino-owned businesses. There are a variety of strategies we can implement to drastically improve how the City does business here. Legislatively and broadly speaking, we should work with our state legislature to reform Chapter 30B to allow for more detailed procurement policies.

More specifically and at a City level, one critique I've heard from W/MBEs or small businesses across our City is that the bidding process is too burdensome and favors large companies. These small companies can do the job but may lack the back-of-house, financial or administrative capacity to compete with larger companies for bids. This is why I've long advocated for our Office of Economic Development to provide much more targeted back of house and capacity-building support to our W/MBEs so they are better positioned to bid and compete for city contracts. I was happy to see the creation of the Boston Contracting Opportunity Fund but we need to increase the available funding for our businesses well beyond the current \$750,000. Additionally, we should make more investments in efforts to certify and regularly market opportunities to M/WBE and enforce regular reporting on these efforts so we can see where investments are needed to accelerate our efforts.

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?

One of the biggest factors driving our affordability crisis is that we are land-poor and have a housing stock shortage. To address this crisis, we need to leverage a variety of strategies, one of which is, of course, building more units. However, this strategy won't work if development is just for those at the top of the market. As we build these units, we need to extract more funding for affordable housing through increased linkage and IDP contributions. We need to use these funds to

build affordable housing at a wider range of incomes and unit sizes tailored to truly meet the needs of Bostonians--not our MetroWest neighbors.

The construction of affordable housing through linkage and IDP won't alone address our housing crisis. The City needs to take a leadership role and invest more funding in programs such as the Acquisition Opportunity Program (AOP) to build permanently affordable housing with responsible developers, use city-owned land to build affordable housing, put programs in place to preserve affordable rents at 'expiring use' buildings created through the State's 13A mortgage programs and continue to expand our investment in first time homebuyer programs, such as ONE+ Boston.

Lastly, we also need to continue to implement creative policies, such as the BPDA's pilot diversity preference, put strong tenant protections in place to stop displacement in the face of intense market pressures and continue to find ways to relieve the high property tax burden of homeowners, particularly our seniors, who live in areas that are experiencing surges in development and related property tax increases.

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.

Mayor Walsh was a strong leader that worked day in and day out to make our City better. Look no further than his steady leadership during one of the most challenging years in our City's history. He made extremely difficult decisions quickly to protect our City during the COVID-19 pandemic and helped guide us to where our City is today. Being Mayor of Boston is one of the hardest jobs in America and Marty worked that job 24/7 and I gotta give him an A.

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 would give Acting Mayor Janey a grade of incomplete. It is simply too early in her term to assess her performance as mayor. I am proud of the historic nature of her role and support her efforts to help our City recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

I supported the passage of the home rule petition that is currently pending at the statehouse, HD 2338, that expands the composition of the ZBA and will continue to advocate for its passage at the State House. This proposal maintains some of the critical technical expertise on the board while adding representation from an environmental protection and climate change member, urban planning member as well as one renter and one homeowner to represent the residential neighborhood organization.

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

Family is the most important thing in the world to me. I unwind by spending quality time with my family and close friends.

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

I've had the opportunity to work with and know many of the mayoral and council candidates. Each candidate brings a unique set of qualifications and desire to serve our residents. I trust that our residents will pick the best candidates for each respective job.

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.