

# 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?

Michelle Wu; 36; Chicago; 17 Augustus Ave, Roslindale

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

City Councilor At-Large, Former City Council President  
Constituency Director, Elizabeth Warren Campaign  
Special Assistant, Office of Mayor Tom Menino  
Small Business Owner

3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.

Graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School  
Fluent in Mandarin and Spanish

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

Member of the Ward 18 Democratic Committee  
Served on the boards of Rosie’s Place, the Kwong Kow Chinese School, Boston Gay Men’s Chorus, RoxVote Coalition, Puerto Rican Veterans Monument Square Association  
Former Chair of the Ward 4 Democratic Committee

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

I'm a mom with two kids in the Boston public schools, a regular MBTA rider, and I live in a multigenerational two-family home in Roslindale with my husband and boys upstairs, and my mom downstairs. I've raised my sisters in this city when my mom was struggling with mental illness, so I'm living the stakes of policy and know the gaps our families face. After nearly a decade in City Hall, first working for the Menino administration, and now in my eighth year on the City Council, I know how to move the levers of government to close gaps and make our systems work for our neighborhoods and families. Through building coalitions and reshaping what's possible in our city, we've taken on big challenges and transformed policies and politics to be more responsive, urgent, and inclusive of all our communities' needs.

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

I'm proud that throughout my time in Boston politics, we've taken on some of the biggest challenges and made strides that many people said would be impossible.

**1) Housing Stability:** I stood up to big corporations that were displacing tenants across the city and driving up rents by putting de facto hotels in residential neighborhoods through Airbnb and other platforms. We passed my legislation for the strongest protections for renters anywhere in the country, and after Airbnb sued Boston, we won a key victory in court that set a new standard for the protection of residential housing across the country.

**2) Equity in City Contracting:** For 5+ years, I've led the charge on the Council for action and accountability to align spending with closing the racial wealth gap. In partnership with then-Councilor Pressley, I authored successful legislation requiring supplier diversity and reporting to quantify the abysmally low percentage of city contracts going to minority-owned businesses to spur action.

**3) Affordable Public Transportation:** I led a coalition protesting MBTA fare hikes and pushing for public transit as a public good, resulting in a roll-back to shield bus riders, seniors, and youth from fare increases. After my [Boston Youth Transportation Project report](#),

BPS expanded free MBTA passes for all students as we'd urged. Recently, the City of Boston announced our very first free bus route, starting later this month.

Time and again, it's taken leadership and vision to champion the important issues--but I've been proud to work with our communities to get it done.

7. Are you a member of a union?

No.

8. Please list any endorsements to date.

- Boston Ward 4 Democratic Committee
- Boston Ward 5 Democratic Committee
- OPEIU Local 453
- Teamsters Local 25
- UNITE HERE New England Joint Board
- Alliance of Unions at the MBTA
- MBTA Inspectors Union Local 600
- Massachusetts Sierra Club
- Sunrise Movement Boston
- Environmental League of Massachusetts
- 350 Massachusetts
- AAPI Victory Fund
- Progressive West Roxbury/Roslindale
- Elizabeth Warren, US Senator
- Lydia Edwards, Boston City Councilor
- Sal DiDomenico, State Senator
- Byron Rushing, Former State Representative
- Julian Cyr, State Senator
- Tram Nguyen, State Representative
- Tommy Vitolo, State Representative
- Jay Gonzalez, Former Democratic nominee for Governor
- Caroline Bays, Watertown Town Councilor

- Ian Cain, Quincy City Councilor
- Ben Ewen-Campen, Somerville City Councilor
- Raul Fernandez, Brookline Select Board member
- Judith Garcia, Chelsea City Councilor
- Stephanie Martins, Everett City Councilor
- Helen Moon, Pittsfield City Councilor
- Vesna Nuon, Lowell City Councilor
- Ryan O'Malley, Malden City Councilor
- Holly Ryan, Newton City Councilor
- Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler, Cambridge City Councilor
- Quinton Y. Zondervan, Cambridge City Councilor
- Sara Nelson, International President of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA

## Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

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

I am a Democrat and believe we must put people first through building coalitions for bold, urgent leadership to tackle our greatest challenges.

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

Mayor Tom Menino: I saw up close how Mayor Menino knew every inch of the city and was always focused on people.

Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley: I'm so proud to be represented by our Congresswoman as a fearless advocate for equity and justice.

Senator Elizabeth Warren: Our Senator fights for working people and focuses on tackling root causes of inequity.

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

No, I have faith in voters deciding through fair elections who can best represent our interests.

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?

Civic engagement is the foundation for not only representative politics, but effective policy. I have consistently advocated for removing barriers to voting access and led the way with legislation on this issue. I also support same-day voter registration, mail-in voting, extending early vote periods, and lowering the voting age to 16. We should encourage young people to vote for the first time while still home and in community, helping build muscle memory for a lifetime of civic engagement.

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

I would support Ranked Choice Voting in the Preliminary Election to identify the top two finishers to advance to the Final Election. I do not support eliminating the Preliminary Election with RCV.

### Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

1. What issue is your top priority if elected?

My top issue is keeping families in Boston. We are in a housing crisis, and residents all across the city face an urgent need for affordability. So many families are spending a higher and higher percentage of their incomes just trying to stay in their homes, with their communities and near their jobs. That's why I've put forward a comprehensive approach to reform our zoning code to build more affordable units, invest \$200 million in federal funds directly into housing, and use City-owned property to add affordable units. We also need to expand

homeownership opportunities and stabilize our communities. Keeping families in Boston also means making transportation reliable and affordable, and transforming our schools so every young person is connected to the full resources and supports across our city.

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

Gun violence is a public health issue, and it requires urgent, intersectional leadership. As a mother, I will make sure that every street and block in our city is safe for all our kids and families. I'll partner with community to create jobs for our young people, safe spaces for celebration and recreation, mental health supports, major investments in community-led anti-violence programs, and immediate action to address the impacts of violence and trauma in our communities. Public safety also means addressing housing instability, food insecurity, transit injustice, mass incarceration, and the climate crisis. I will also join with state and federal partners to fight to update our gun laws, including updating Massachusetts' assault weapons ban law yearly and preventing individuals from amassing a large store of weapons.

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

As a BPS mom, I'll lean in urgently to stabilize and revitalize Boston Public Schools. In the midst of my mom's struggles with mental illness, I raised my younger sister and navigated BPS as her legal guardian through middle school and high school. Today I'm doing the same for my own kids, ages 4 and 6, in BPS. So I've seen the challenges facing our district and how the pandemic has deepened the long-standing inequities and struggles of our school communities. These challenges are compounded when policy decisions are not made collaboratively or communicated transparently; when educators lack the resources they need to do their jobs; and when the responsibility for protecting the health and well-being of our children is siloed in certain City agencies rather than embedded throughout all City decisions and operations. We need more than a new policy approach to Boston Public Schools—we need bold, urgent leadership

to lift up Boston's children as a true community mission. Our [schools plan](#) centers on creating universal access to early education, taking a whole-child, whole-community approach, revamping BPS facilities, and investing in vocational education.

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

I strongly support residency and believe we need to pay our employees enough and create enough affordable housing so that it isn't a constant struggle to stay 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?

The Strand is a community treasure and should be the anchor for a thriving arts district right at Uphams Corner as well as integrated into a citywide elevation of arts and culture. This is an important area where the community needs to be fully engaged in the process. I'm eager to work with community organizations to bring new arts programming through connecting local artists and organizations, opening up affordable performances, and stabilizing neighborhood organizations in the space. My [arts plan](#) is built on coordinating the funding, facilities, and leadership for Boston to be a leading arts and culture city, and I would look to maximize the Strand Theater's impact in surrounding communities and citywide.

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

We are in a race against the Delta variant to end this deadly pandemic, and that requires strong city leadership to close the vaccination gap and ensure protections for our community members. Just as BPS students are required to show proof of many other vaccinations to register for Boston schools, we should require COVID-19 vaccinations as we are still battling the pandemic and take every possible step to remove barriers to being vaccinated across our neighborhoods, including offering vaccination at schools.

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

I support a majority-elected school committee, with elected members for democratic accountability and additional appointed members to ensure representation of Boston's diversity and expertise, and mayoral accountability. I also support giving full voting power to the student representative on the committee. I would appoint school committee members with expertise and lived experience in early childhood, school facilities, and vocational education--to close the gaps that BPS has maintained for too long.

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?

I've visited every BPS high school and seen the wide disparities across our district. Structural barriers in selective admissions shut out too many Black, Latinx, and economically disadvantaged students seeking academic rigor and programming. I support an admissions process that includes an exam aligned with the BPS curriculum, grades, and targeted criteria to account for different resource levels in a more granular way, such as census tract data. As mayor, I will carefully revisit the data on how various communities will be impacted by potential changes to the process. Most importantly, students at every high school must have access to well-resourced academics, facilities, health and wellness supports, and extracurricular activities. The exam schools conversation must be part of a comprehensive community planning process to reform the offerings and quality across all high schools.

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

Yes, I support democratic accountability and greater engagement in setting the city budget. I voted for this ballot question to be added to the ballot, and I will vote for it in November.

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?

The Police Commissioner is one of the most important leadership posts in the city. As mayor, I'll conduct a thorough, national search for a permanent police commissioner to bring reforms and build trust with community. We must select a leader for the department who can be a partner to carry out the vision for public safety grounded in public health, racial justice, and building trust of our residents. I've outlined more in our plan for police reform [here](#).

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

I support the ongoing renovations to City Hall Plaza to ensure the space is more accessible, welcoming, and conducive to programming for a more inclusive and vibrant public space. As City Council President, I oversaw the first major renovations of the City Council Chamber for universal accessibility, and support similar updates to City Hall for accessibility, energy efficiency, and to ensure we are creating a welcoming space for all.

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?

Although we have seen important plans created under the Climate Ready Boston initiative, we are in an urgent window of time where we need to move quickly to implementation, funding, and action. Boston is one of the most climate vulnerable cities in the world, and we already see the devastating impacts of climate change through flooding, heavy rain, and increasing heat. I'm proud that my team has put forward the first [city-level Green New Deal](#) in the country to meet the scale and urgency of the climate crisis. Our plan would transition Boston to a thriving green economy with an ambitious roadmap for structural change built on sustainable energy, good jobs, and healthy, connected communities.

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

Yes.

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

Yes. I agree with Attorney General Healey, who has sued giant gig companies for violating Massachusetts law and denying their workers the wages, benefits, and legal protections established in our law. We cannot allow powerful tech companies to undermine laws that reflect our values, that all workers should be able to earn a living, take care of their health, and protect against injury, harassment, and discrimination on the job.

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?

As mayor I'll build on my track record of leadership and action to build wealth in Boston's neighborhoods to close the racial wealth gap. More than five years ago, I partnered with then-Councilor Ayanna Pressley to pass groundbreaking legislation requiring supplier diversity and accountability for equity in contracting. We know the disparities because of that ordinance--starting with Boston's \$664 million of annual discretionary spend in FY2018, which directed less than 1% of taxpayer dollars to businesses owned by people of color and less than 1% to Boston-based businesses. I'll continue leading by streamlining the procurement process for accountability, breaking up contract sizes for local businesses to access bidding opportunities, and building pipelines for local entrepreneurship to city contracts. We must also set clear goals. In a city that is majority people of color, Boston's official goal is still at just 10% of City contracts to people of color. We should be leading the country and aiming for our city's diversity to be reflected in public spending. Food is one area where the city can dig in right away, and I've laid out [clear steps](#) to get us towards increased fairness in our city contracting system, while

pushing other industries in Boston to do the same to create local jobs and close the racial wealth gap.

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?

Boston is in a housing crisis, and we must take urgent action to stabilize families and stop displacement. Our City's housing plan should be integrated with our economic development plan, so we invest in the infrastructure for housing and transportation to absorb increasing population--otherwise families get pushed out. As Mayor, I'll lean into City resources and land to build affordable housing, reform our zoning code to streamline and speed up approvals, especially for affordable developments, and fight for stabilizing our families. I'm the only candidate who has committed to putting \$200 million in federal aid towards addressing our housing crisis, making housing stability the foundation for our recovery. Finally, we need to replace the BPDA with a planning agency that can create a citywide plan to ensure families can stay in their homes and connect with transit, schools, climate, food access, and community.

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.

The mayor of Boston should be held accountable to deliver affordable housing and safe streets, nurturing and inspiring schools, and climate leadership. In recent years, Boston has seen higher housing costs than at any other time in our history, exacerbating the racial wealth gap and fueling a displacement crisis. To meet the moment, we need transformative city leadership that works to reshape what's possible and make Boston a city for everyone.

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.

In this moment of transition, we need effective leadership and a vision for the future that includes all our communities. I celebrate this historic moment for Boston with the barriers that Mayor Janey has broken. I was the first candidate to announce my mayoral campaign, back in September 2020, because this was never about any assessment of political opportunity, but about bringing the citywide leadership, vision, and experience to deliver for Boston families.

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

The ZBA has been marred by scandal in recent years and needs to be part of our approach to reforming Boston's development process. I support ensuring expertise on the board that is necessary for our long-term resiliency, such as in urban planning, climate, and the environment. The ZBA should also meet much higher standards for transparency and accountability, with regular reports on zoning variances so that residents have transparency across our neighborhoods.

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

My family and I love to be outdoors, and we have so many special spots across Boston's parks, playgrounds, and urban wilds--whether it's taking in the beautiful view of Fort Point Channel and playing at Martin's Playground, or a family bike ride at Pope John Paul II Park, or a stroll through Franklin Park or the Arboretum. And there's always ice cream!

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

I'm grateful to all the candidates on the ballot for stepping forward and offering a vision for the city we all love. I'm running for Mayor because I know what's possible for our city to meet the moment, and

I look forward to working with the new City Council as partners to deliver change for all our communities.

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.