

# 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?  
Said Abdikarim, 36, born in Somalia., I was resettled in Boston 27 years ago as a refugee and currently live in Boston.
2. What is your present occupation? Also, please note any past employment that may be relevant to your candidacy.  
Recently I received a leadership award for my work in the community, working with minority students and immigrants, navigate and succeed in Boston. I spent the past six years helping immigrants resettle in Boston, by helping them learn English, find housing, jobs, and ensuring they know their rights as employees. While at the same time working with students, teaching them life, career, and technical skills. Although now I have been primarily working as a candidate running for office, I previously worked in leadership positions at Apple, Harvard University, Fidelity Investments, and AT&T as an engineer, consultant, and instructor.
3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.  
I was educated right here in Boston. I attended multiple Boston public schools due to having moved around a lot at four different public housings. I attended James Hennigan Elementary School, Irving Middle School, RG Shaw Middle School, and Charlestown High School. I graduated from The Ohio State University and started a graduate course work at Harvard University while an engineer and instructor there. In college, I was an honor roll student and have received several dean’s list recognition for academic achievement.
4. Please list some of your affiliations with non-profits, civic associations, and political groups.  
I volunteered at so many nonprofits, community orgs, and BPS. Most recently I worked with the African Community Economic Development of New England. I helped immigrants resettle in Boston, learn English, find housing and jobs. I mentored students and taught them life, career, and technical skills.
5. What in your experience to date will most help you to be an effective leader?  
My volunteer experience for the past six years helping immigrants resettle in Boston and working with students from underserved communities. My leadership experience through the jobs I held, along with my teaching experience at Harvard University. The many years being part of the Boston public school and public housing system where I experienced the ins and outs

of what it is like and in what ways it can be improved upon. Also being able to speak different languages makes me an effective leader because I can understand those that don't speak English.

In the city council, I would have access to groups best positioned to help different communities, and with my academic, professional, and mixed background, I would be able to lead and form neighborhood coalitions and community groups. I also feel that as city councilor I can use this position to better advocate for things we need; STEM/VOC skills for, higher-paying jobs, access to housing, small business support, multi-language programs, better transportation, community outreach, etc.

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

I am proud to have helped so many immigrants resettle in the city of Boston. Proud to help them learn the English language, find housing and jobs. I am proud to have worked with students at after-school programs, teaching them life, career, and technical skills. I am proud to be a lead organizer in the immigrant community, using my language skills, to bring awareness about covid 19 and vaccination access.

7. Are you a member of a union?

I have been a member of a few unions: Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers and Communications Workers of America while I worked for both companies. Yes, I have walked a picket line with Harvard Graduate Student Union. It was one of the most honorable things I have done because I saw firsthand how mistreated these graduate students were before they decided to organize and fight for better work conditions.

8. Please list any endorsements to date.

We will announce our endorsements in the next week. We are waiting to hold a press conference with community leaders and the political leaders that will endorse us.

## Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

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

I am a member of the democratic party running as a democrat in this current race.

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

Mayor Menino. He was the first politician I ever volunteered for and had a personal interaction with. I will never forget what he first said to me in his unique voice. After asking for my name and where I was from, he said that he is an immigrant like me, and he wants Boston to be for everyone. And that he was happy I was civically engaged at a young age. Another thing that I liked about him was that he always showed up and took the time to talk to people. I

also had the opportunity to meet Mayor Walsh and talk to him. I was really inspired by his life story and that he believed in giving people second chances.

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

I don't think the city council should be a job that lasts forever at least without the opportunity for continued elections. If you do a good job and are an effective candidate and leader then the voters will be able to take that into account and control whether you get to continue to be in office.

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?

Without the proper resources, technology I think it will be difficult to do same-day voter registration. I am in favor of mail-in voting. Regarding lowering the voting age, I feel that it is a matter of the maturity and understanding of the individuals of the voting process they are participating in. There are a lot of 16-year-olds that don't understand the political issues that are going on so I would advocate for creating more civic engagement in afterschool, in school, and community engagement programs that can help better prepare and educate them at that age. If these advocacies can be implemented or considered, then yes, we might have a better chance of allowing them to participate. I also think that for as young as 16 or 17 it would be at their discretion to register to vote in that case, because again that would ensure that they are making it their choice to engage in the political issues.

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

I think a rank-choice voting system is a great tool and can be very effective in races with a high number of candidates. This is not limited to races with a high number of candidates; however, it can still be effectively utilized in letting the voters have more options in expressing their choices via ranking. Although I think that because rank-choice is still a new option, we should be continuing to provide helpful materials to best prepare the voters.

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

1. What is your top priority if elected?
2. Housing (expansion of affordable housing options, ownership disparities, and public housing)
3. Environmental justice (cleaning up the parks, providing clean drinking water, providing healthy and safe playgrounds, addressing the needs of green energy through transpiration, etc.)
4. C. Addressing the lack of STEM/VOC education and programs, especially for underserved communities, which contributes to the message of my campaign

of bridging the gap in pay and wealth disparities. People need economic empowerment to live in Boston and thrive.

5. **Public Safety:** Creating safe neighborhoods, with great quality of life is very important for me. I was resettled in Boston for safety reasons because I escaped a civil war in my birth country. In Boston I got the safety to enjoy being a kid, playing in the park, going to school, etc. However, my friend was shot and killed in 2006 for no reason after we left each other. These experiences showed me the importance of public safety. This includes funding BPD to provide for an expansion of services within policing and services that can better be used to create safer policing, such as mental health and social services professionals working alongside officers.

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

Gun violence is very personal for me. In the summer of 2006 after splitting up with my friend to meet up a few hours later, he was shot for no reason walking home at castle square apartments. My friend and I came to Boston for safety after escaping the civil war in Somalia. But instead of attending college that year, he lost his life for no reason. Making every neighborhood in Boston safe, with great quality of life is a top priority for me. On the other hand, gun violence is plaguing our youth. We need a tailored effort to curb gun violence, to help our youth understand the importance of reconciliation. We need a tailored community policing that is sensitive to societal and environmental effects on our youth. I would allocate funding to programs that provide job readiness training, skills for higher wages, reconciliation education.

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

In such polarizing times as these, the main agency I think we should be making a top priority for reform is the Boston Police system. I believe that to reform the police we need an actual change in how policing works, this includes funding for our police. We need to hire more police from communities they are trying to represent with lived experiences. Communities can better benefit from policing that is better when we have officers on the force from communities they serve. Funding can provide for an expansion of services within policing and services that can better be used to create mental health and social services professionals working alongside officers. I will advocate creating a certificate program that new and seasoned officers can take to learn about different communities, cultural awareness, de-escalation, etc.

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

I do support the residency requirement. We need to hire people from Boston because they know the needs of their neighborhoods. We need to hire Bostonians that are qualified and that understands the importance of public service.

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?

Our city has a golden opportunity to utilize this theater and bring arts education and entertainment to residents. We can use this space to teach tangible skills in oral, written communication, arts to our students. This theatre can be used to attract comedians, actors, artists, to come to Boston and hold events. The revenue generated can be used to support arts programs.

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

I am fully vaccinated. I am proud to say that I am the lead organizer in the immigrant community for vaccination awareness and education. In consultation with parents, health experts, the city, and schools, we should help parents understand vaccination, by providing resources in their language,

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

I am open to an elected school committee if at least we try a hybrid model that includes accountability on both sides; those appointed and those elected.

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 am the only candidate who has proposed an essay option for underserved students and for immigrant students to be able to talk about their educational experiences, their background, and what going to an exam school would mean to them. As an immigrant student, going to BPS from elementary to high school, I think students can excel on the exam, get into exam schools, if they have quality pre-K education and tutoring services. I took the exam school test but didn't get into an exam school. Based on my experience, if I had better pre-k education, I would have had a better educational experience. If we put more emphasis on providing quality pre-k education, tutoring services, STEM/VOC education, job readiness programs, we win as a city.

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?

This process should be a collaborative effort that includes community input, experts in policing, community development, local leaders, to make sure the right person is appointed police commissioner. Public safety is very important for me. I was resettled in Boston as a refugee because I came from a war-torn country. In Boston, I found safety and the freedom to pursue my goals. We need a police commissioner that is experienced, especially working in underserved communities, that is sensitive to the diversity of Boston

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

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?

This is a start and step in the right direction. But as a rich city with tons of resources, we need to prioritize at the highest level for climate readiness. Our parks, playgrounds, streets, infrastructure, transportation, and areas of water should have the latest equipment, be energy efficient, and be climate crisis ready.

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

I plan to vote to make sure families aren't displaced, to bridge the pay and wealth gap, to create an environmentally ready, friendly, and beautiful city. And a Boston with quality, affordable transportation.

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

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? One of the biggest reasons I decided to run was to bridge the pay and wealth gap. If all Bostonians aren't getting equal access to city resources, working with my colleagues, I will make sure to find tangible solutions to curb this issue. I would make it a priority to meet certain quotas that city contracts be given to black, Latino, and women-owned businesses. Companies that meet and exceed these quotas should be awarded and commended.

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?

What makes our city grow, be competitive, vibrant, is having people from all backgrounds call Boston home. I think 69, 000 is too low to meet the needs of our housing crisis. But it was a step in the right direction by the Walsh administration. To balance growth, we need to be intentional with tangible solutions to address displacement in Dorchester and across the city. What I would do is meet with community members, experts in housing, community development, public, private sectors, leaders at the state and city level, to make sure no one is displaced. I would fight for funding for workforce development, skills in STEM/VOC for higher-paying jobs. People need economic empowerment more than ever. As a child bouncing around, living in four different public housings, to working with immigrants to find housing, I know the importance of housing.

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. "B+"

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. "B"

19. Will you seek to expand or change the composition of the Zoning Board of Appeals? If so, how? We need to have neighborhood-specific elected board members as part of ZBA.

20. When not on the campaign trail, how do you unwind? I spend time with my family or play basketball with friends.

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

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.