

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?

Jon Spillane, 30 years old, born & raised in Hyde Park, now living at 43 Irving St.

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

I recently passed the bar exam and became an attorney, and currently am campaigning full-time for City Council. My last two positions are particularly important to my candidacy:

*1/20-3/21 Office of Councilor Kenzie Bok - Boston, MA
Director of Budget and Constituent Services*

“As the Director of Budget for the Chair of Ways and Means and Director of Neighborhood Services, Jon helped manage one of the toughest city budgets in recent memory and contributed to policy discussions that resulted in new ordinances. Jon also worked as an advocate for people directly affected by COVID-19, connecting tenants to rent relief and small businesses to Boston’s Office of Economic Development.”

*9/17-1/20 Department of Neighborhood Development - Boston, MA
Housing Development Officer*

“At DND, he was part of a team that leveraged city resources – NHT grants, HUD funding, city-owned parcels, and inclusionary zoning requirements – to build more affordable housing. While at DND, Jon managed the planning, preservation, financing, and development of over 1,000 affordable housing units across the City. He was able to see firsthand the impact affordable housing can have on an individual, a family, and a community. From organizing and running community meetings, underwriting financial spreadsheets, to presenting before city boards and commissions, Jon knows the city’s housing process and what needs to be improved.”

3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.

Suffolk Law School Class of 2020
- Suffolk Law Jurisprudence Award for Commercial Law Sales and Leases, Distinguished Oral Advocate Award-

Boston College Class of 2013
-Carroll School of Management- Finance and Marketing Concentration-

Boston Latin School Class of 2009

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

Boston Ward 5 Democratic Committee
Beacon Hill Civic Association
Founding Member - Young Professional Board Member of the Genesis Foundation for Children

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

My past experience working in the City Council chamber, working on creating & passing the budget, on complicated policy issues like the budget powers ballot question, and on constituent services during COVID-19.

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

1 - Managed the planning, preservation, financing, and development of over 1,000 affordable housing units across Boston
2 - Served as Director of Budget for the Chair of Ways and Means and Director of Neighborhood Services, Jon helped manage one of the toughest city budgets in recent memory
3 - Working as an advocate for people directly affected by COVID-19, connecting tenants to rent relief and small businesses to Boston's Office of Economic Development
helping constituents in covid 19

7. Are you a member of a union?

I am a former member of SEIU 888

8. Please list any endorsements to date.

Suffolk County Register of Deeds Stephen Murphy
District 3 City Councilor Frank Baker
District 8 City Councilor Kenzie Bok
State Senator Frank Baker
State Representative Jay Livingstone
State Representative Adrian Madaro
Boston Ward 5 Democratic Committee
North Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters
Laborers' Local 223

Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

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

I am a registered Democrat and would describe myself as a pragmatic progressive, much like former Mayor Marty Walsh and President Biden.

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

Tom Menino - I am 30 years old, and the Boston that I grew up in has gotten safer and more prosperous every year I've been alive. That wasn't true for my parents or grandparents, and Mayor Menino the "Urban Mechanic" was a primary factor - I admire that he prioritized the nuts and bolts issues of a neighborhood.

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

No

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?

I think there are three things that would increase voter turnout in Boston city elections:

1 - The top thing that would increase voter turnout is changing the schedule of Boston's election from the current off-off-year elections to even year elections. Even in the highest turnout years for Boston City Elections, turnout is dwarfed by gubernatorial, let alone presidential, vote totals.

2- I think the top issue for making voting easier in Boston is re-precincting. Boston hasn't done that in decades, and the City has changed significantly during that time. Re-precincting would allow better placement of voting locations, and make redistricting easier.

3- Boston's population has grown since our City moved from an all At-Large City Council to a hybrid At-Large and District system. To accommodate that growth, I would like to see two more district seats added to the City Council. Smaller districts that allow for easier in-person campaigning would boost turnout and likely increase the number of challenges to incumbents.

Mail-in voting and in-person early voting really boosted turnout in Massachusetts last year, and I would like to see both continue. I support

enacting same-day voter registration. I do not support lowering the voting age.

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

No.

Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

1. What is your top priority if elected?

Taking on the housing crisis is my top priority, and to do that, we need a city-wide zoning overhaul in Boston. It is a big undertaking, but having inclusive conversations about what neighborhoods want to see, and how those desires intersect with the need for more housing is essential to build the public support required to take on this challenge.

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

I think there are three things we can do:

- 1 - Crack down on out-of-state gun smugglers who provide the weapons driving violence in Boston.
- 2 - Doubling down on the community policing approach.
- 3 - Continue efforts to diversify our police force so BPD reflects the make-up of the community they serve.

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

I want to see Boston create its own Planning Department, with planners who are on the City of Boston's payroll, and work on behalf of the City's residents. This issue is especially important for me because to do a zoning overhaul and some of the other changes I would like to see to ease the housing crisis while increasing transparency in development, we need a city planning department.

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

I support residency as it exists now.

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 jewel of the city and Dorchester, standing as the only remaining large scale theater located outside the Theater District and

in a community of color. After the renovations made during the Walsh administration, it is clear that the next step for the City to focus on is finding a partner who can run the Strand on a permanent basis. We have seen theaters like this succeed in Somerville's Davis Square and Brookline's Coolidge Corner. Public Transit accessibility defines both those venues, and the same can hold true for the Strand. An important part of the winning pitch needs to be marketing the Strand Theater and Upham's Corner more generally as a place that's only a short train ride from South Station on the Fairmount Line. The Strand needs to continue to be a resource to its immediate neighborhood, and to the wider Boston community.

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

Our small business community was devastated last year. We cannot survive another shut down. Our focus should be on vaccinating our remaining populations, particularly vulnerable communities. I think requiring a proof of vaccination like NYC should be considered as a last resort to encourage more people to get vaccinated - something that is safe, effective, and backed by science.

We should do everything possible to return to in-person learning for the '21-'22 school year. Students who are eligible for the vaccine should be vaccinated, just as they are for other major diseases. Our students cannot afford another school year taught virtually this could lead to an increase of our education gap.

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

I have been deeply disappointed with how many School Committee members recently wrote and said things that led to their resignations. Changes to how School Committee members are chosen and put onto the Committee must be made. I believe that rather than go back to an elected body, the City Council needs to be given the responsibility to approve all appointments and reappointments to the School Committee. Just as Boston City Council has the final say on approving members of the Zoning Board of Appeal and the School Committee's budget, it should have the final say on who goes onto the Council. This would present a public opportunity to talk about the qualifications, experience, viewpoints, and goals each potential School Committee member brings with them, and allow the Mayor's administration to more publicly lay out their vision for public education in Boston.

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?

Since the beginning of the campaign I've supported the use of an exam in the admission process for our exam schools. I am glad the recent decision includes an exam and seeks to address the inequity in representation in our exam schools, but I fear it may be an overcorrection and we've yet to see simulations from the BPS on how this will impact every school community. In addition, we need to place as much focus on our schools that are struggling to ensure all Boston students are being prepared for a successful secondary school experience. We have 125 schools in Boston and all of the students in those schools deserve the same time and attention we've seen devoted to the three exam schools.

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

During my time working in the City Council chamber, I worked with Councilor Bok and Councilor Edwards on the participatory budget policy currently being proposed. I support creating a more transparent and collaborative budget process. I would prefer a system where each neighborhood is ear-marked a certain amount of funds that are then allocated through a participatory process.

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 next police commissioner should be chosen by whomever the voters of Boston elect this November. I would like to see a nation-wide search for a commissioner that includes public participation, much like what we saw with the most recent school superintendent search.

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

Yes particularly the plaza needed to be redeveloped to be more accessible for public use.

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?

I think Climate Ready Boston is an excellent effort to meet the challenge of climate change at the local level. The fact is that a 'sufficient response to prepare for the anticipated climate change' is not something that Boston, Massachusetts, or even the United States can do on its own. I am happy that President Biden is working to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord, and hope to see more leadership and funding from the federal level in the coming years.

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

I plan on supporting the Fair Share Amendment. I am often asked where we can find new revenue for the investments our City and State need to make in housing, transportation, and climate, and this is one of the biggest potential revenue sources.

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

I believe that gig workers should be considered company employees.

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 have an economic development plan coming out soon that has a whole section devoted to answering this question. It starts with comparing Boston to peer cities that shows 1.2% is very, very low, and that much, much higher numbers are possible: in Philadelphia, 35% of city contracts are awarded to minority-owned businesses. Getting from 1.2% to 35% will obviously take a lot of work, but I think that City Councilors and the next Mayor's staff need to look to cities like Philly and Washington D.C. who are successful at this and start copying and adapting programs and tactics for Boston.

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?

Mayor Walsh's goal was part of a regional goal that Boston and its first ring suburbs all agreed to - creating 300,000 units of housing across 16 communities. That strategy points the way that the housing crisis gets solved - by involving the other 350 towns and cities in Massachusetts to pull their weight when it comes to housing production. Mayor Walsh set big goals, and that resulted in creating more affordable housing for people to buy and rent than any other American city, and in tens of thousands of market-rate units that are also essential to preventing displacement. Boston needs to demand that the state legislature get involved and make these goals official, by setting targets for housing building for every community in our state. It is time for the suburbs to get off the sidelines and start being part of the solution for our state's housing crisis.

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 increase the capacity of our Zoning Board of Appeals, to end the packed agendas and lightning round process we see now. More frequent ZBA meetings would lower the number of projects being heard at each meeting and allow for a more thorough conversation involving members of the community and city staff. The increased cost of increasing the ZBA's capacity could be offset by the increased number of permits we are able to process because of the more efficient structure.

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

Cheering on our local sports teams, and trying to fit in a run when I can in one of our local parks to help keep off campaign weight. One of the best things about running City wide is you get to indulge in visiting the best restaurants in each neighborhood.

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

If I weren't running, I would be hard at work making sure that my old boss Councilor Kenzie Bok wins re-election.

Thank you for participating in the Dorchester Reporter questionnaire. Please send the completed document as a PDF or WordDoc to newseditor@dotnews.com by Fri. Aug. 8, 2021.