

# 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?  
Josette Williams, age 53, Brooklyn, 91 Fowler St Dorchester, MA 02121

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

I am the interim Director of BPS's Countdown to Kindergarten program. I have worked supporting families for the past 30 years through a community organizing lens, whether it be through juvenile justice, healthcare, or early childhood education. One of my earliest jobs was working with youth organizers engaging with "at-risk youth" (term used at the time) with newcomer communities, especially Asian and Latin American, in collaboration with multilingual and multicultural youth communities in East Boston to advance their leadership and build inroads with community policing; I helped to create Green Shirts, a spin-off of Red Shirts, with the city, to employ youth in developing, maintaining, and beautifying green spaces where they lived. (Funded by Mayor Menino's Main Streets Program and Pew Charitable Trust)

In addition, I coordinated case-management for emergency and scattered-site shelters with Crittenton Hasting House. My work included supporting pregnant and parenting youth and adults by providing and facilitating workshops, training and self-sufficiency programming to attain stable and permanent housing.

3. Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.

Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational Technical High School  
(Wakefield, MA) Multiple trades, finished with High School diploma and medical assisting as the trade

Cambridge College (3 years + 2 courses from a Bachelors)

Graduated from Emerge Massachusetts, Class of 2021

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

I have helped to create and lead a handful of impactful equity-based community organizations in Boston, including First Teacher, Vital Village Networks and Vital Village Community Partnerships out of BMC and the DSNI (Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative) School-Readiness Roundtable. These community organizations are trusted by families in Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, and beyond.

As mentioned above, I recently graduated from Emerge Massachusetts, Class of 2021. The mission of Emerge is to increase the number of Democratic women leaders from diverse backgrounds in public office through recruitment, training, and providing a powerful network.

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

- Working with youth organizers engaging with "at-risk youth" (term used at the time) with newcomer communities, especially Asian and Latin American, in collaboration with multilingual and multicultural youth communities in East Boston to advance their leadership and build inroads with community policing; I helped to create Green Shirts, a spin-off of Red Shirts, with the city, to employ youth in developing, maintaining, and beautifying green spaces where they lived. (Funded by Mayor Menino's Main Streets Program and Pew Charitable Trust)
- Working with women and children living in the shelter as a case manager, assisting them into long-term sustainable housing
- Work in BPS alongside community orgs and as a parent sitting on governing councils - able to support community work, BPS work, and work for my own child - bringing families to the table

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

1. Raising my daughter as a single parent, been transient - navigating financial, social emotional, etc - she is now a freshman at Northeastern with a full-ride - got a job that allowed for sustainability
2. Being a founding member of two powerful community-led organizations: Vital Village Networks and First Teacher.
3. Leading BPS' [Countdown to Kindergarten](#) initiative which ensures that families help get their children off to the right start in life by providing age-appropriate developmental resources, organizing play and learning groups across the city and supporting families to make the appropriate school choices for their children

7. Are you a member of a union? No

8. Please list any endorsements to date.

Lots of D4 residents

Mass NOW PAC

Pressley Policy Pledge (not an official endorsement)

## Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

1. What is your party affiliation and how would you characterize your political ideology? Democrat - I am liberal and value humanity that is focused on inclusivity and the wellbeing of people. I value civility and others' opinions; I focus on negotiating and consensus and coalition-building versus tearing others down.

2. Please name up to three (and at least one) of your political role models? Please feel free to explain your choices.  
Stacey Abrams - she is the reason I jumped into this and am leading with the idea of Reactivation and our slogan, "Power Up the People" - this is what she has done across the nation.

Barack Obama - because of his community organizing background. That is how we have run our campaign team from the beginning - it is about community organizing and decision making as well as teaching and learning. 95% of my team have never worked on a campaign before.

Ayanna Pressley - Someone I feel like I can align with in terms of her policymaking. She truly believes in the strengthening and uplifting of people. Her policies align with my values and belief systems. Besides which, she is obviously a badass Black woman from Boston.

3. Are you in favor of term limits for the seat you are seeking? If so, how many terms? No - because that is what voting is for. For any leader to do quality, impactful work, two years is not sufficient to expect change given the limitations and the turnaround time to run again that will inevitably pull your attention away from your community. I am in favor of longer terms for this reason.

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?

What we are already doing - hitting as many doors as possible, not just the doors of super-voters. Being sure to spend quality time in areas that have low voter turn-out and general mistrust in our political system to have deeper, authentic conversations about voter knowledge and impact - voter education, etc.

I support all of the voting reforms outlined in this question. As we witness national voter suppression and attempts to enact policies that would disenfranchise voters of color, we must be hyper-vigilant - even in Boston.

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

### Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

1. What is your top priority if elected?

In terms of policy, rethinking how we partner with families as they support their child's educational journey, starting at birth; ensuring consistent equity throughout their education experience.

In terms of constituent services, accountability from 311 - how is our district being responded to or not?

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

Through four pathways:

1. Investment in our young people
2. Community building block by block, building trust with one another.
3. Recovery piece - ensuring we are getting 1. trauma informed care to our community -including 24-hour access to high-quality and culturally appropriate mental health services and 2. workforce development and access to high-quality employment.
4. Community policing: insisting on more authentic relationships between officers and community members, ensuring that officers are held accountable to the community. Improvement data is shared with the community on progress of police reforms, civilian board transparency and accountability, stakeholder partnerships with trauma-informed care emergency response teams and culturally responsive practices.

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

**BPDA:** Needs to prioritize neighborhood and citywide master planning and update comprehensive zoning code from those adopted in the 1960s, which could be accomplished by separating development from planning and ALLOWING BROADER REPRESENTATION IN THE PLANNING PROCESS. Functions that duplicate functions performed by City agencies can be transferred out of BPDA. An open public budget approval process needs to be implemented as well. Again, we would be better served to bring the BPDA more under the umbrella of the City but if there are easier ways to accomplish our goals, I would pursue those avenues.

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

Absolutely - people who work to improve the city should have some skin in the game.

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?

This is all about community engagement: giving communities opportunities to access a historic theater space - to perform, connect, build networks. This is an invaluable chance to partner with local arts organizations, and to provide space for local artists.

Additionally, as the Strand property is being RFP'ed for a new developer and operators, finding anchor organizations with strong financial track records and proven ability to deliver world-class performances and arts education will be critical. I would like to work with the Office of Economic Development to ensure that the right anchor tenants are identified.

I would also work with major arts organizations across the city to bring their productions to the Strand and to partner with smaller Dorchester arts organizations to produce new works especially for the Strand. The events calendar for the Strand should be full every year and events cross-marketed with arts organizations and networks across the city.

Lastly, it will also be important, as neighborhood development continues in Uphams Corner, that parking for the Strand be expanded. This will also enhance its appeal as a neighborhood and citywide destination.

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

Pro-vaccination. Yes, students should be required to be vaccinated; however, we must allow for religious or other belief systems exemptions like we do for other vaccinations. We must also have a plan to accommodate the children of families who refuse to be vaccinated.

7. Do you favor a return to an elected School Committee? Please explain. I believe in a hybrid approach to selecting School Committee members.

There are lessons to be learned from when Boston *did* have an elected school committee so that we do not replicate inaccessible systems. I believe community leaders, residents, and youth should be able to nominate potential committee members and those nominations must be reflective of the BPS student and family body. This will ensure that the person with the most money raised is not necessarily the person on the committee. Once members have been nominated by their community, then a board consisting of the Mayor, sitting council president, BSAC and Mayor's youth leadership, BPS parents, community leaders and school committee alumni should be assembled as a board, to discuss and come

up with the final decision. At this point, if there is no consensus, the Mayor should have the final decision to break any stagnation in the process.

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? Absolutely - we kept it 100!

9. Do you support the citywide ballot question that would hand new budgetary powers to the City Council? Yes - change the charter!

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?

I would favor a national search conducted by a hiring committee that includes the newly enacted civilian board, community members and representatives from community organizations, BPD representation, representatives from the health sector and from public health departments. The committee has to work with and represent a holistic view of public safety and community wellbeing.

Boston's next police chief should:

- Be committed to transparency and accountability within the department
- Have a clear sense of when policing is an effective intervention and when it is not
- Lead the development and institutionalization of alternative de-escalation and diversion methods
- Work with other professionals and city agencies more expert in care-based approaches to train officers to make appropriate interventions when force is not required and to create a system that more strategically deploys the appropriate professionals in crisis situations
- Be a relationship builder who listens deeply to communities

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?

Climate Ready Boston offers a strategic and thorough frame for forecasting a variety of Boston's future resilience scenarios and for helping the public better understanding the urgent mitigation and adaptation steps

that need to be taken to control (to the best of our abilities) the effects of climate change. Coupled with the Climate Action Plan, which is more specific about mitigation and adaptation targets, we have a roadmap for climate change investment and intervention.

That said, we don't make Boston Climate Ready without doing the following:

- **Outline clearer climate equity goals and actions.** We have to protect the people and neighborhoods most vulnerable to climate change and its dangerous weather effects (i.e., heat, storm intensity, flooding, etc.) and make sure that they don't disproportionately bear the cost for saving the city. Black and Brown people and low-income people are in the line of fire and our plans have to prioritize our wellbeing and safety.
- **Climate action and climate equity plans have to be overlaid with neighborhood planning and the work of the BPDA.** There is no development in the city of Boston that should be considered complete without detailed climate mitigation, adaptation and equity plans - neighborhood by neighborhood.
- **The private sector has to step up, lean into the goals of both Climate Ready Boston and the state's Climate Change legislation and make the investments only they can make to reduce Boston's and Massachusetts commercial carbon footprint.** Networks like the Green Ribbon Commission can't just talk about it, but must take action to reduce their emissions and encourage peer companies to do the same. Some of its members are lamenting losses to the bottom line, but there is not bottom line if the economy is overwhelmed by climate catastrophes.
- **Improve public transportation to decrease the number of car trips in the region.** A more robust transportation plan not only calls for bolder investment and reform by the state, but greater imagination and greater resource commitment in Boston. Boston has to move, in partnership with the state, to a bus rapid transit system that makes better use of our major thoroughfares and provides better service in neighborhoods with little access to diverse modes of transportation. We need more frequent service on the Fairmont line to connect outlying neighborhoods to the city core. And, we need to continue reimagining South Station, North Station and Widett Circle as more functional transportation hubs. When we give riders improved options, which also ensure public health safety beyond the COVID crisis, we will put a dent in transportation emissions.

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? Unionize gig workers! The pandemic has made the importance of worker protections more evident than at any time since, perhaps, the dawn of unions. These protections need to be afforded “gig workers” and can be done so in ways that allow for flexibility by prorating benefits against hours worked. Additionally, cities and states need to make sure that public resources are provided to make high-quality health care, in particular, a right and to, in the process, create more creative cost share between the public and private sector to create a guarantee of health access for all workers, full and part time. I will work to make sure that the public sector is an appropriate partner in providing the kinds of services that support workers without letting corporations off of the hook for supporting and honoring their workers.

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 would create a role for a person to ensure accountability for actually providing outreach and access as well as assistance on applications as part of the contract initiatives. We must be intentional in informing and assisting Black and Latino businesses with contract application before we consider awarding bids.

There must be transparency back to the community - consistent data reports on our progress working toward a significant increase in city contracts awarded to Black or Latino-owned businesses must be presented quarterly.

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?

We would need to study the most updated data points on housing instability, homelessness, and home-ownership in order to answer this question. Covid has dramatically impacted many D4 residents' housing, so any data we have pre-Covid would no longer be sufficient. However, given 69,000 new units, what we would need to know is how many of those units are actually allocated to D4. How many are deemed low-income? How many are allocated for new, *actual* affordable homeownership? How many of these units will be set aside to transition families to stable housing from homelessness?

If we are going to balance growth, we need to have a clear idea of which of our constituents need to access this housing in order to avoid displacing D4 residents, many of whom have been here for generations.

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. C+ - nothing about Mass and Cass, housing and contracts for BIPOC - no accountability. Really did not address the exam school issue - every time there was an attempt for real progressive equity work in the schools, he skirted - until Mayor Janey stepped in. He did take a positive stance on immigration - "I'll house them in City Hall if I have to!" Sanctuary cities, libraries restored, Covid relief and support.

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+ - Exam schools, OPAT, housing - increasing people's ability to access funds for first-time homebuyers.

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

It's **imperative** that we structurally build boards **that reflect** and are **representative of** the communities in which they serve. If we are to achieve racial equity and economic **justice, who** and how we choose those who serve us, are crucial to the decisions they make and the outcomes that impact the community as a whole.

Having a representative from each of the districts of Boston is where I would start. Do we have youth representation? Language capacity? Disability community? Who is not at the table and how do we make sure they are and we provide the support they need to stay?

This is not just about conflict of interest but transparency, functionality and an **adequate** number of serving members for the city. We tend to sit at a crossroads with appointed versus elected officials these days. I believe we can develop a new comprehensive process that is inclusive of the community creating an authentic **representation and an informed group of decision makers with trade expertise and lived experience to help build a more equitable board of appeal.**

20. When not on the campaign trail, how do you unwind?  
Connecting with friends and family  
Cleaning and organizing my home  
Playing spades  
The moment I can hit the dance floor again will be a joyous occasion!

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

Andrea Campbell or Kim Janey - two strong Black women

So thrilled that so many activists are running in our district - I would support all of them in service to our district, but I don't like avoiding these questions, so: Deejo Jibril for D4 because I support a qualified woman holding the seat, and Brian Worrell would be my next choice, if I was not a candidate.

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.