

Every City election year, the Fenway News asks the final 8 At-Large City Council candidates a set of questions regarding concerns of voters in the Fenway. We print them in a special spread a month before the election, along with photos provided by the candidates. This year for the first time we can also offer candidates more space on Fenway News Online to answer other questions or make other arguments for their election. Here are this year's questions:

### **COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING**

Several of the candidates talk about a community based planning process. What does this mean? Will each neighborhood create an elected council?

As City-Councillor at Large, one of my key objectives would be to work to build partnerships that include every resident of Boston. One element of achieving this is to ensure that residents are fully engaged as citizens, and a community-based planning process could be an effective tool towards this end. I support the development of community-based councils that would act as full partners in City-level planning processes. I believe that these councils would be most accountable to their respective communities if membership is determined through a full democratic election, though I acknowledge that in the short-term, appointments may be a necessary interim step.

A critical issue in establishing an effective civic partnership with each Boston resident is making sure that all Boston communities have equitable access to our municipal government. A community-based planning process rests on the premise that well-defined communities can be identified, and the boundaries for these communities are most likely to follow existing precinct and district boundaries. Boston has not engaged in a thorough re-drawing of precincts since the 1920s, and our neighborhoods have changed substantially since then. It is our responsibility to make sure that all residents have equal access to the democratic political process. Any effort to develop legislation in support of a community-based planning process must be accompanied by an effort to ensure that the constituent communities reflect the demographic realities that currently define the social geography of Boston.

### **COMMUNITY CENTER**

Establishing a Fenway community center has been a priority for many Fenway citizens who have participated in planning exercises and meetings. What would you do to help the Fenway get such a facility?

Every resident of Boston deserves to live in a sustainable neighborhood that provides ample opportunities for social and civic engagement. While many Boston neighborhoods provide attractions that are of city-wide, state-wide, nation-wide, and even international interest, investments supporting these attractions should not come at the expense of facilities of interest to neighborhood residents. A community center such as the one proposed by the Fenway Community Development Corporation as part of its broader Urban Village Plan would not only be an effective use of City resources, but moreover is an example of the advantage of community-level input into the planning process.

While the proposed community center would provide clear benefits for the residents of the Fenway neighborhood, it has the potential to provide benefits to residents of the larger Boston community as well. As an At-Large City Councillor, I would work to develop city-wide support for a center by emphasizing this broader set of contributions. Many if not all of Boston's neighborhoods would benefit from the development of a sustainable urban village including a vital community center. A community center in Fenway as a pilot project would leverage the hard work of the Fenway CDC and its partners in leading the way towards making all of Boston's neighborhoods into safer and cleaner places to live. Moreover, the development of a community center as part of a larger development project would create a significant number of environmentally sustainable employment opportunities—all the more so to the extent that the project can be replicated broadly across Boston neighborhoods.

### **HOUSING**

Under Mayor Menno's inclusionary zoning policy developers of housing must provide some middle income affordable units in their new building (or pay into a fund). Developers of recently built housing in the Fenway have complied, offering one-bedroom units at over \$1,400 a month. Do you believe this is affordable? Lower income brackets should also be supplied with affordable housing? If so, how would you change the laws and regulations to insure that "affordable housing" is actually affordable to lower income Boston residents?

One bedroom units for \$1,400 a month are far from affordable for most residents of Boston, and I certainly believe that individuals in lower-income brackets should have access to affordable housing. While Mayor Menino's Inclusionary Zoning Policy reflected a step in the right direction when it was initially passed, there is substantial room to update this policy to include the needs of a wider range of Boston residents. As an At-Large City Councillor, I would work to expand the range of this program to this effect. In particular, I would support the more full inclusion of community-based input in the planning process in support of this goal.

An additional way to ensure that affordable housing is actually affordable to lower-income Boston residents is to make sure that housing is developed with the needs of low-income residents in the first place. The City of Boston recently made Federal Stimulus funds available to convert unsold foreclosed homes into energy-efficient affordable housing for low-income and homeless families. As a board member for Heading Home, a group dedicated to transitioning homeless families to permanent housing, I see the needs of low-income families first-hand. As City Councillor At-Large, I would ensure that families most in need of affordable housing get access to these converted properties by connecting effective programs such as the Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance to existing City efforts to develop housing.

Candidates should use no more than 750 words to answer all three questions. We will trim for space if necessary. In the event that a candidate doesn't manage to get answers to us, we run a blank space in that candidate's slot. Candidate's answers are due on Tuesday, September 29, at 5 p.m. The October issue of the Fenway News will be published on Friday, October 2.

Here is a sample of other questions candidates might wish to address in the more free-form space available on our website. Space is not an issue here, but we all know that concise statements sway more voters than long-winded ones.

**MORE QUESTIONS:**

Real estate prices are still falling in Boston. What should the assessing department do to assign values of Boston houses?

What should be done about the aborted construction at the Longwood Center site at Brookline Avenue and Longwood?

What do you think of limitations on the number of unmarried people renting apartments? How can define boarding houses properly?

Are any changes needed at the Boston Housing Authority?

Last year the Boston City Council voted to extend the life of Urban Renewal projects around the city, including the Fenway Urban Renewal Area, thus extending the BRA's continuing control over development in the Fenway and other neighborhoods. If elected, will you introduce and support an ordinance to reverse this decision?

Would you agree to work to split the BRA into two agencies, one for planning and one for development, as is done in every other major US city?" subset: "Are you aware that a large part of the BRA's funding comes from fees paid by developers for their projects?"

Recent studies have shown that the most important indicator of success in school is the economic status of the classmates one goes to school with. Families that move from poor neighborhood to middle class neighborhoods have better scholarship in schools than do the same sorts of families who stay in poor neighborhoods. What would you do to improve education for Boston students?

What should be the City's policy on licensing private citizens to carry guns?

What will help the pan handler situation on Mass. Ave. and how do you propose to fund it?

What would you do about the annual Sept 1 trash dump all over the streets of districts where students are moving out/in?

What policies would the candidates follow regarding email retention?

What should the City be doing about groundwater depletion, a serious problem in the Fenway and Back Bay?

Should there be more taxicab medallions?

If elected, will you join Councilor Turner in banning BSL4 labs in Boston?

Don't feel limited by these questions. Use this opportunity to tell the citizens of the Fenway why you should be elected to their City Council. Also, your deadline here is not so severe. When you get your statements to us, we will put them up.

Stephen Brophy, editor