

District 9 City Council Questionnaire

This questionnaire provides responses from the candidates for questions that were submitted for the District 9 Candidates Forum but were not asked during the live program. Responses are formatted as submitted – the only edits made to responses were for spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Topic: Housing (rental and homeownership)

How would you work to make sure that affordable units in the city are attainable to local residents (based off local AMI levels) and not offset by the impacts of municipalities with higher median incomes such as Lexington, Newton, and Wellesley?

- **Councilor Breadon:** Since taking office in January 2020 I have worked with developers and the BPTA to get a greater number of IDP units and to get a spread of AMI's that more closely reflects the earnings of AB residents. The City requires 13% IDP units – we have secured commitments for 15%, 17%, 20%, 26% and in one case 100%. Before I took office most IDP units were pegged at 70% of AMI which is more than the Median income for AB– we now get a spread from 50%-100% AMI so that more people have a chance of qualifying. We are also getting more family size units included in IDP.
- **Michael Bianchi:** I would like to see a system in place where local residents have first access to new housing, especially in cases where individuals and/or families may be displaced due to new developments. I am in the process of thinking about logistics but an example of what we could do is setting up home-buying and Job search programs to provide tools and resources for locals to be able to continue progressing as opposed to staying complacent.
- **Eric Porter:** Ownership is the best form of rent control. I am worried that many of the buildings will take away affordable rent apartments after only a few years. Ownership locks your rent in for 30 years and helps you build long term wealth and a retirement. One time subsidized down payments are better than subsidized monthly rents.

Allston-Brighton is home to many properties run by absentee and/or predatory landlords. What will you do to support tenants' rights in terms of eviction protections, letting tenants know their rights when working with their landlords, and rent stabilization/control laws?

- **Councilor Breadon:** The Office of Housing Stability was set up to help residents find and maintain stable, safe, and affordable housing. They have a website with Tenant Resources and provide a walk-in hours and clinics to help tenants who have housing issues. Most tenants especially new tenants
- **Michael Bianchi:** As a city we need more frequent inspections and more follow up inspections to ensure that the landlords are up to code, as well as ensuring that predatory landlords are not able to price gouge units that are sub-par to the living standards. Also, we need to protect our renters, too often when a landlord has to replace something on their property, they will raise the rent. This is unethical and if no fault to the tenant, is not their responsibility to pay for. Therefore, it is important to have a representative in office that will listen, take action, and follow up to ensure everyone is getting what they need.
- **Eric Porter:** I became a landlord because I did not like my landlord at the time. I could see how he was mistreating and disrespecting his tenants. I have always taught my tenants about

tenant's rights and advocated for them to be treated fairly. All three parties need to be held accountable for their actions: landlord, tenant, and the city – all three play a roll.

Homeownership rates in Allston Brighton are some of the lowest in Boston at around 12% for Allston and 22.5% for Brighton. As our City Councilor, what would you do to increase access to affordable and sustainable homeownership for first-time homebuyers and incentivize owner-occupancy?

- **Michael Bianchi:** As city councilor I want to work on securing affordable housing that is purchasable to people in the city through first time home buyer programs. I think we need to take a look at abandoned and condemned properties and start there with refurbishing and bringing them to code, possibly selling at cost of construction. Home ownership is one way to start to break the wealth gap that plagues Boston residents and offers a chance to create generational wealth in our low-income communities. Individuals and/or families who want to rent should be able to rent and those who want to own should have the resources if needed available to help and/or guide them to do so. We can start to be a more equitable district by utilizing what we already have.
- **Eric Porter:** My feeling is that several of the buildings being built now, will go unrented and go back to the banks. At that point they can be turned into MUCH NEEDED condos. With affordable ownership, the fed/state programs can help with down payment to get people to have a non-increasing mortgage payment for 30 years (unlike rent).

How have you balanced the need for rental and home ownership in Allston Brighton over the past 2 years, and what changes do you plan going forward put more emphasis on ownership? This question was submitted directly for Councilor Breadon

- **Councilor Breadon:** There is a speculative housing market in Allston Brighton in which investors buy homes for cash before they come to market. Regular homebuyers cannot compete with investors turning up with \$1million in cash for a two-family home. They then proceed to turn every possible living space into a bedroom in order to maximize their return on their investment. This is profoundly damaging to the fabric of our neighborhood. That money does not stay here, rents are high, and we suffer from the absentee landlords not taking care of their properties. Potential homeowners are unable to purchase a home. The liberal granting of variances to convert our 2 & 3 family homes into more, smaller units which will rent for higher rents motivates this kind of speculation. We have tried to reduce the number of variances to try and preserve family homes. Every project that comes along we push for home ownership. If homeownership is not on offer, we push for as high a percentage of affordability as we can get.

Allston Yards / Stop and Shop refused to give us any homeownership – and only 17% IDP units – the community wanted 20% - they offered \$2million for support for homeownership. While I was still City Councilor Elect, I pushed to BPDA and the Mayor to get the developer to give us a higher IDP % they refused but we did get another \$2 million into the home ownership fund for down payment assistance.

Allston Square (City Realty) asked to change from condo units to all rentals. This was unacceptable so we insisted that if they wanted rentals, we would expect 25% IDP units. They revised their plan and went back to condos.

Large property owners such as Harvard and the Archdiocese granting leaseholds to developers who then say they cannot do homeownership are stymieing us in our efforts to increase new home ownership opportunities. We will continue to advocate for more new home ownership opportunities.

Topic: Community Planning and Development

Mayor Flynn's Allston-Brighton Planning and Zoning Advisory Committee and those that worked on the Allston Brighton Interim Planning Overlay District zoning amendment wanted to reserve Allston Landing (including the former CSX Beacon Parks railyard) for low-to-moderate income housing. Is this still the plan? If not, would you advocate for a higher percentage of low-to-moderate income housing to be included in the development of Allston Landing? What would be your specific plan to address this issue?

- **Councilor Breadon:** Harvard owns 1/3 of Allston including the Beacon Yards area, we are asking that Harvard makes a commitment to establishing a new neighborhood in this area that is inclusive, equitable and resilient with mixed income housing, affordable home ownership, public green space, and adequate public transit infrastructure to support all the new development.
- **Michael Bianchi:** Allston Landing absolutely needs to remain low-income housing and art studios to better support Allston-Brighton's vibrant culture. New developments go up and as little percentages of affordable units may help it is not very obtainable or equitable. There is not much underutilized space left in Allston-Brighton and the city needs to step in and maximize the usage before selling out to big developers.
- **Eric Porter:** That plan is over 30 years old and was meant to be an interim plan to the Articles 51 zoning. Since that time projects such as the Guest street plan (New Balance area) were agreed upon by the community and then massively violated by the Walsh administration. I think there will be much cleanup work from all the currently approved construction and by default, much like the Barry's Corner project of the 1970s, there will be buildings converted to low-income housing by default.

The BPDA has a plan to eliminate parking on both sides of Western Ave (bus and bike lanes). What is your stance understanding that there is going to be several larger housing projects in the pipeline for the Western Ave area? How will this impact the abutting residential neighborhood?

- **Councilor Breadon:** The Western Avenue corridor will undergo significant development in the next 10-20 years, not just residential but Labs. At present, around 6,000 parking spaces are being proposed for projects already in the pipeline, not to mention future projects. This level of traffic is unsustainable. It is essential that we plan for improved public transit, commuter rail/ light rail and bike lanes, so that we can reduce the number of single rider vehicles passing through our neighborhood.
- **Michael Bianchi:** Western Ave is one of the wider corridors in Allston-Brighton. I would like to see official data collected by conducting surveys in the community to see how the residents feel about removing parking on both sides. I know when I am taking 5 kids down to Smiths field with skateboards and scooters it is a lot easier to drive than make a 32-minute walk. I think we need to plan for what the future of cars is going to look like and do a better job of city mapping and implementing plans that the community wants to see done.
- **Eric Porter:** I am not opposed to making Western Ave wider, but it would be nice if Urban Planning managed it rather than several New Jersey Developers making buildings for

themselves. Parking is mandatory, and much consideration for these needs must be taken and managed properly, otherwise you are creating buildings that will, for example, not allow grandmothers to visit their grandchildren due to lack of parking.

Topic: Institutional Expansion

Institutional expansion remains a substantial issue in Allston Brighton especially given what can be experienced by residents as aggressive plans of colleges and universities to improve their extensive holdings. As a city councilor, how do you plan to hold our local colleges and universities accountable to the communities they reside in?

- **Councilor Breadon:** Institutional expansion in Allston Brighton over the past 30 years has driven speculative investment in our older housing stock and effectively inflating the cost of family homes and blocked potential homeowners from buying in the neighborhood. I will continue to push our institutions to house more students on campus. Our universities need to pay their Payment In Lieu Of Taxed (PILOT) assessment. 73% of the city budget is paid from property taxes – why should residential property owners carry that burden; we need our large not for profit institutions to pay their fair share.
- **Michael Bianchi:** The institutions need to realize their devastating impacts on the community and be a part of the solution. As a part of the community, they bring a wide range of culture and business, but Allston Brighton is more than just a college town.
 - I want to involve the colleges in our surrounding areas to provide more aid for affordable housing opportunities.
 - Connect people in the community through events and special programs (Ex. Volunteering, Tutoring, Sports, Arts, and culture).
 - Create spaces and/or events that create opportunities to express our vibrant artistic culture.
- **Eric Porter:** Just getting them to pay their agreed upon 1/8th taxes would be a good start. The Universities are playing the game of Monopoly and they have a huge tax advantage compared to others. If Harvard and Boston University owned 100% of Allston-Brighton, then the City of Boston would get 1/8th the property tax (assuming the Universities would even pay). Right now, the citizens are carrying Universities that are basically very profitable corporations (albeit non-profit corporations).

Topic: Rats

What is your vision, plan, and implementation strategy to address the rodent issues on properties owned by absentee landlords?

- **Councilor Breadon:** Rodents are a huge issue across the city and especially here in Allston Brighton. We hope to walk the neighborhood with ISD and DPW in the coming weeks. Inappropriate disposal of trash and open trash cans and dumpsters make it easy for rats to access food, standing water hospitable place for rodents. The ISD as a “Pest Management” public education program and that information needs to be shared extensively with for property managers, renters, and landlords. Requiring contractors on development projects to extend the period in which they bait building sites. Councilors Flynn, Edwards and I will be holding a follow-up hearing on Rodent Control and Illegal Dumping this fall.

- **Michael Bianchi:** The city needs to set aside a budget for rodent mitigation. This is a public health issue that is affecting residents, the environment, and small businesses. To think that this issue is not taken seriously or that there is nothing the city can do to help with the infestation is astounding. I have noticed on a lot of building complexes they do not have recycling bins. To reduce overflowing trash bins this mandate should be put in place. There should be stricter fines on poor waste management handling, landlords need to be held accountable for their property.
- **Eric Porter:** Rats are ALL the residents' problem, as much as I would like to single out absentee landlords. But clearly by definition these landlords are not the ones feeding the rats. Yes, these landlords do have a responsibility, but all residents do too. Managing rats' food sources is most important. So, things like metal trash cans would help massively. The restaurants are also one of the largest food sources, so proper dumpsters and food containment needs to be addressed. Eradicating the rats would be the next issue. This will require a proactive roll from the city and unfortunately the residents also. Training neighborhood groups would be most effective. For the last week of August 2021 each night I have set up traps to minimize the number of rats in my abutting area. It is unpleasant, but there are very few better options. The city realistically cannot trap a giant number of rats in any one neighborhood, but they can train, educate, and help promote groups of people who are willing to manage the issue of rodent control. This is not the answer people want to hear, but it is the solution that will solve the problem.

Topic: Community Inclusion

Michael is the only candidate that has spoken about people with disabilities. We have a significant number of adults with disabilities in Allston-Brighton. They cannot apply for apartments at places like Continuum or Guest Street because they have too little income. What would you do to advocate for employment and housing opportunities for people with disabilities?

- **Councilor Breadon:** Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing in zoning ordinance is designed to prohibit developers from excluding certain protected classes when building new residential buildings. This would include, families, and people with disabilities. Developers are required to build ADA accessible apartments, but we need to do more to ensure that they are affordable for individuals with disabilities and for families with a person with a disability.
- **Michael Bianchi:** My focus to create an inclusive and diverse community includes people of all backgrounds, financial status, and disability. When we have an inclusive community, it adds substance to the soul and vibrancy we have. Our community needs to work together to start an equity roundtable where stakeholders from all diversities have a seat and voice. I volunteered at Boston college mentoring a camp for people with all kinds of disabilities and met some of the most talented and smartest individuals. We have to protect programs as such and create more to ensure that they are getting the assistance they need. We also need to manage the way building is happening to ensure that it does not exclude so many people. If this cannot be accomplished the city has to rethink and develop more affordable and equitable units.
- **Eric Porter:** I believe you are asking about people with disabilities with low-income, rather than all people with disabilities. If so, I think it would be important to focus on advocacy for these people. I wager there is already a great deal of advocacy around employment, but I can see where they are slipping through the cracks for affordable housing. It would great to see the developers make further concessions for people with disabilities, that would be my first approach.

As a candidate and/or City Councilor how will you show through your policy and actions that Black Lives Matter in Allston Brighton?

- **Councilor Breadon:** Black Lives Matter! The racial wealth gap in Boston is huge. Black communities are still impacted by the historic practice of redlining and disinvesting in neighborhoods of color. To address these systemic inequities, we need to leverage every opportunity to increase the job opportunities and earning capacity of BIPOC. As your councilor I have worked to ensure that the Boston Resident Jobs Policy is enforced for construction jobs in AB. As new life science industries come to our neighborhood, I am advocating for a jobs pipeline with vocational and technical education and STEM education to ensure that our BPS students (who are majority people of color) are prepared to work in these new industries, to get good paying jobs and are able have economic security that would allow them to stay in our city and thrive.

We need to increase affordable home ownership opportunities across the city. MAHA and City of Boston have developed the One+ Boston mortgage program to support first generation homebuyers to purchase a home and build generational wealth. We need to interrupt the school to prison pipeline by improving our schools, replacing police officers with guidance councilors and mental health professionals, and introducing restorative justice circle to teach peaceful conflict resolution techniques to our young people.

- **Michael Bianchi:** As a member of a blended family, we have learned to work together to better understand one another's privilege and challenges. A heavy focus on education, housing, and small business we will be able to break through the wealth gap and provide an opportunity to make a more diverse community that encourages a successful and growing environment free of racial bias and anyone that calls AB home feels safe and comfortable being who they are.
- **Eric Porter:** As someone who lived on the edge of Detroit and South-Central Los Angeles, I understand the importance of showing respect and uplifting the black community across America. My policies in Allston-Brighton would reflect these beliefs.

Topic: *Open Space*

The City of Boston, as part of its street tree program, in the past gave residents trees to plant in their yard (and take care of) if there was no sidewalk space available. This part of the street tree program has been discontinued. As city councilor, would you advocate that this program be re-instituted and increased spending be provided for city trees in general? Why or why not?

- **Councilor Breadon:** Trees are a vital tool in mitigating the impacts of climate change and urban heat island effect. I co-sponsored a city ordinance with Councilor Arroyo to protect and expand our urban tree canopy. We are losing many mature trees from private property at the same time as the city is trying to increase urban tree canopy on public space. Boston has developed an Urban Forest Plan and I will continue to advocate for funding and resources to ensure that the plan is implemented to increase our tree canopy.
- **Michael Bianchi:** This is a hot topic especially with the developments being built that do not include green space or foliage. I personally was not aware of this program, but it sounds like a delightful idea giving residents the opportunity to help create and maintain more greenery. Not only will residents feel they are contributing to the environment but a great way to start helping

the climate change crisis. It also puts less strain on the city budget if the maintenance of the foliage is not required.

Eric Porter: Trees are extremely beneficial for numerous reasons. Shade from trees can reduce heat in a house. They purify the air. They provide aesthetics and can be calming to the human spirit. The list goes on and on. I think this is a great program that should continue, and it should also provide guidance for location and type of planting as well as considerations for any root damage that can come from their growth.

Topic: Public Safety and Law Enforcement

The neighborhood has seen a recent spike in violent crime with the attack and stabbing of Rabbi Noginski last month and another incident taking place recently which resulted in 3 people being stabbed. Thankfully, Boston Police were able to quickly identify and apprehend the suspects in both attacks. With increased calls for redistributing funds from the police budget for more community-focused programs and services. What is your vision for public safety for Allston Brighton? Do you support reducing the police budget locally?

- **Councilor Breadon:** Fortunately, officers from D14 responded quickly to the two recent violent attacks and apprehended the perpetrators, however, the majority of 911 calls in Allston Brighton are for people experiencing a mental health emergency. In the last budget funds were allocated to hire mental health professionals to co-respond to these calls. This program needs to be expanded.

We expect our police department to deal with situations for which they are not trained. If there is a problem, we call 911 and the police respond. I welcome the pilot program to use mental health professionals to co-respond to incidents involving people in a mental health crisis. The BPD overtime budget is out of control and is unsustainable. The OT system needs to be reformed under the leadership of a new Mayor, a new Police Commissioner and included in contract negotiations with the police unions. Ensuring that district police stations are fully staffed by moving officers from special units out to the districts should reduce the need for compulsory overtime at the district level. A thorough personnel review should identify jobs that could be performed by civilian staff to free up uniformed officers for police duties.

Police details at construction sites are not paid from the OT budget. There are not enough officers available to cover the demand for construction details across the city and this may be the time to seriously look at using civilian flaggers for construction details. Undoubtedly there will be some details that do require a police officer. Right now, there are many instances of utility work on our streets where there is no one flagging traffic because there are no police officers available to cover the detail.

- **Michael Bianchi:** I do not believe that reducing the police budget will be beneficial to reducing crime because we rely on our police to keep our streets safe and the Boston police force goes through some of the most rigorous training in the United States. We do need to allocate those funds for better crisis response programs and junior police programs. We need measures to ensure all of our officers are held to the highest standards of justice. The last time I checked, the police make up 11% of the budget. Demanding professionalism is different from decreasing funds.
- **Eric Porter:** A review of the budgets might be a good idea, again with a fourfold increase in property taxes plus all the new construction there may be a much due increase in both police

and social services budget. I have spoken a great deal about safety, and it is one of my top concerns.

Topic: Small Businesses

So many local stores and restaurants have left our main streets in the past two years, how will you attract small businesses back to our neighborhoods and how will you make sure commercial rental prices are fair for the average business owner? How will you make sure property owners are not favoring franchises/chains?

- **Councilor Breadon:** Our small businesses are the lifeblood of our main streets districts and we need to support them to stay in our neighborhood. It is encouraging to see that Brighton center has added a few new businesses amid the pandemic, but we have lost others across the district. The city council has looked at introducing a vacancy tax of empty shop fronts, but it is sometimes difficult to establish if the business is actually gone as more business is being done on-line. We would need to rely on POS data to know if a business was actually gone.
- **Michael Bianchi:** I propose we put in place an empty unit tax on developments that choose to keep their units empty, rather than lowering their prices so that small businesses other than chains can afford to fill these spaces.
- **Eric Porter:** The role of the City Councilor is not responsible for these issues, this would be more the roll of Allston Main Streets, though I would be happy to weigh in as a resident. If these were issues that a majority of the residents wanted advocacy around, I would then get involved as much as able.

During the pandemic, city processes have become more streamlined, (for example outdoor dining has become a very easy process for businesses), what would you keep? What else could be easier? Candidate Michael Bianchi missed this question, so we are providing now for his response:

- **Michael Bianchi:** The utilization of street space to help business stay open during the pandemic was brilliant and detrimental to saving some small businesses. I think that if we want to keep these spaces available that we need to have conversations with the members of the community and business owners to see if this is still something we still want. If we do consider keeping these spaces rules and regulation need to be reviewed to ensure safety of pedestrians traffic and patrons and workers.

Vacant storefronts cause a street or neighborhood to lose vibrancy and invite graffiti, littering, and vandalism. Some storefronts have remained vacant for years due to the high rental costs, with property management companies uninterested in filling those leases. What would be your plan to combat this issue, and would you support a penalty on property owners that keep a storefront vacant for over a year?

- **Councilor Breadon:** I would favor a penalty for keeping a storefront vacant for over a year. I would favor proactively working with landlords, business tenants and the city to ensure that premises are fully rented and that we have lively, interesting, and fully activated business districts. If a storefront becomes vacant for a period of time, I would favor a program in which pop-up businesses or seasonal markets could utilize the space.

- **Michael Bianchi:** the idea that a development would rather let a unit remain empty and fall into decay before lowering their price to attract businesses to lease their units seems backwards and not equitable. these actions are not sustainable, and we can effectively reduce this by fighting for an empty unit tax? this money could be used to create and fund more inclusive housing and small business spaces.
- **Eric Porter:** From the pandemic, things being online and zoom meetings have made many processes more accessible and efficient. I think this is a great trend and would like it to expand in many directions so that people have easier access to an even broader range of city services – Now that is the role of the City Councilor!