

Felix Arroyo

Affordable Housing

For too long, Boston has been a city where the “working poor” have not been able to afford to live. I find that unacceptable. The people who work in Boston should be able to afford to live here, too, and I will make it a priority as an elected official to address the shortage of affordable and low-income housing in the city. One of the most straightforward ways to address the problem is to change the formula that is used to determine ‘affordability,’ which presently includes income data for the Greater Boston area, thereby inflating median income figures. If elected, I would move to change the formula.

Development

As an elected member of the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council, I have been able to successfully advocate with and on behalf of my neighbors for the construction of affordable housing. We have to ensure that whenever housing is being built that we also build affordable units so that everyone in our city has the opportunity to own a home. When communities are a part of the planning and process, development is beneficial to our neighborhoods. It creates jobs, supports local businesses, and eliminates blight. It is crucial that our neighborhoods and their residents play a role in deciding the future development of our city. I will also make sure that when development occurs, Boston residents are being given the first opportunity to work on the projects, and as someone who believes in the trade union movement, I will insist on union worksites.

Environment and Energy

1. Encourage bicycling by expanding bike lanes and improving roadways that bikers use. Dr. Peter Furth of Northeastern University has come up with several proposals to make Boston more bike-friendly, and I would add those to initiatives that the current administration is already pursuing.
2. Promote home weatherization trainings to make sure our housing stock is as energy efficient as possible (this is also a component of an economic development plan that will look to create thousands of ‘green jobs’ retrofitting houses in Boston)
3. Establish compost collection for homes and restaurants, turning waste into nutritious soil for our community gardens and residents who garden at their homes.

Youth Violence

As a youth sports coach (I coach young men between the ages of 13–15 in Jamaica Plains’ Regan Baseball League), I’m confronted daily by the youth violence problem in our city. My belief is that we have to create a system that values young people, and there are numerous steps that must be taken to change our culture and improve their chances of being successful. It begins with improving the quality of the education they receive in the public schools, and continues with the creation of jobs that let parents spend more time with their families and less time trying to make ends meet. We must also work creatively with institutions like our community centers and non-profit organizations like the Hyde Square Task Force and the Food Project, to give young people alternatives.

Accountability, Transparency

1. Public financing of municipal elections. Private financing of elections leads to the perception of a conflict of interest (the so-called “pay-to-play” system) at best and outright corruption at worst. It is clear that a system of publicly-financed elections would remove the leverage that special interests have over our elected officials, and encourage candidates who are otherwise willing to participate.
2. Create a Planning Department. The City’s development and planning process is dominated by the unaccountable and conflicted BRA. I am calling for significant reforms of the BRA, including a Home Rule Petition to create a City Planning Department. My proposal would create a Department independent from and with authority over the BRA, and structured to foster an open process.
3. Support legislation that makes our elected officials disclose any income that they make outside of their job as an elected official.

Education

Busing is a controversial subject in Boston, but we have to address the issue at the root of the controversy, which is inequitable distribution of resources. My wife, my mother, and my sister are all teachers in the Boston Public schools. I am aware of the challenges that they and their students confront on a daily basis. My priorities will be to focus on providing a quality education for all students, and then engaging in a discussion about how to revamp the transportation system.

The achievement gap is the result of three things: lack of resources at certain schools, lack of valuing the child as a student at certain schools and lack of involvement on the part of some parents. We need to make sure all schools in the BPS have the resources to educate children properly. We need to believe that all of our children can be good students. Unfortunately, addressing parental involvement is more difficult. We need to insure that all parents have access to the schools their children attend and that we make it easier for our parents to be a part of their children’s education.

Human Services

I am always trying to make the best use of the resources I have in any situation, which is one of the qualities I think makes me a good candidate for the city council. \$10 million invested in early prevention would reap many more millions in savings on treatments for diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and other chronic illnesses. As an organizer at Northeast Action with Health Care for America Now, I have come to understand that we spend billions of dollars trying to cure illnesses that could be easily prevented for much less money. I am also a part of the “Test One Million Movement,” whose mission is for one million Black and Latino Americans to get tested for HIV by 2010. This is another example of an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure, where testing can prevent transmission of a virus and the associated health costs.

Transportation

Overall, I support the idea of ‘complete streets,’ which means revamping our streets, paths and railways to complement all modes of transportation, including walking, bicycling, access for the disabled, public transportation, and driving. I am particularly concerned about the MBTA crisis and the proposed fare hike. The T, by its own admission, is on the brink of financial disaster. And much of it has to do with an unfair debt load. To make T riders pay a fare increase when ridership is at an all-time high defies common sense, particularly if the goal is to reduce traffic congestion on our streets, improve air quality in our neighborhoods, and provide working people with an affordable transportation alternative. The Boston City Council can’t turn this around by itself, but can be an important and influential part of a wider organization, by encouraging T riders to speak out, and ensuring that our state legislators and governor hear and understand their needs.

Jobs and Labor

Reforming the state’s CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) system would have an enormous impact on unemployment and job disparities in Boston. Under the current system, ex-offenders have to wait up to 15 years for their criminal record to be sealed. As a result, they are unable to find employment. A reformed CORI system that allows records to be sealed sooner and eliminates questions about criminal background on initial job applications, making it easier for ex-offenders to re-enter society and become productive citizens.

Race and Diversity

1. Improve public education. Boston’s public schools are overwhelmingly attended by young people of color. In

order for them to succeed in any chosen field, they need the quality education that is the foundation of any pursuit.

2. Creative advertising of civil service opportunities. As someone who has done extensive work in Boston’s communities of color, I would argue that there are better ways to advertise openings at government agencies than the ones that are typically used.
3. Address leadership disparities. One way to retain diversity in the workforce in the absence of affirmative action policies is to give employees of color equal access to promotions and leadership opportunities. There is evidence that this isn’t happening consistently in Boston’s government and civil service agencies.

Budget Policy

Compared to other cities across the U.S., Boston falls woefully short in the diversity with which it raises revenue. The city is far too dependent on property tax. In order to weather any financial storm, and to improve our quality of life even in the best of times, Boston must lessen its reliance on property tax while at the same time working to increase the payments-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILOT) paid by our abundant non-profit institutions, which own over 50 percent of the city’s land. I support recent efforts to establish a meals tax and a hotels tax, and would work as a City Councilor to diversify our revenue further and also to improve PILOT payments. I will always be looking for ways to make the tax system more progressive.

I would cut from the BRA and add to Public Health and the Boston Public Schools.

Lightning Round (Yes or No)

Many workers in Boston are organizing to form unions, especially in the hospitals. Will you publicly support their efforts to organize? **Yes**

Do you support the death penalty? **No**

Do you support same sex marriage? **Yes**

Do you support anti-discrimination laws that protect someone from being fired, or denied housing, education, or access to public facilities (including bathrooms) based on their gender identity? **Yes**

Are you pro-choice? **Yes**

Would you support a state constitutional amendment implementing a progressive income tax? **Yes**