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Affordable Housing

In these difficult economic times, the City of Boston's high costs of living present a greater challenge to our residents more than at any point in recent memory. As an at-large city councilor, my first priority will be to revamp the BRA so that the functions of planning and development may be addressed separately. At present, economic development projects are concentrated in the downtown area and without regard to the creation of housing that is both safe and affordable. As someone with a background in city planning, I know that in order to ensure the creation of more affordable housing, the city will need to work around development goals that are both sustainable and commensurate with the dire needs of neighborhood development and low-income housing projects.

Development

First, I would hope to expand the zones currently eligible for micro-loans under the Mayor's development program within the Jamaica Plain vicinity. Continued capital construction projects that will take currently vacant sites and convert them into either housing or businesses will inject a much-needed economic stimulus into the area. Second, the issue of affordable housing is particularly applicable to JP, where only decades ago low rents attracted many first-time homebuyers and students. Living costs have become prohibitively high, and any development objectives in JP must be driven with a housing component in mind. Third, I would be in favor of a campaign to promote and support the neighborhood's vibrant fine arts community. We should be encouraging all Bostonians to avail themselves of JP's exciting jazz clubs and other such entertainment venues.

Environment and Energy

First and foremost, the key to engaging the public in environmental issues is through education. There are many and an increasing number of action steps that individuals and communities can take to increase energy efficiency and reduce the community's overall carbon footprint. Individuals can reduce their energy usage by unplugging appliances that aren't being used, weatherproofing their homes to reduce the need for winter heating, buying locally-grown produce, using public transportation or electric- motored bikes whenever possible, replacing fluorescent light bulbs with Ultra Compact LEDs, and so many others. I would establish a citywide Make Boston Green campaign that combines informational resources and tax policies to incentivize environmentally-friendly behaviors. Actions steps would range from tax breaks for businesses that purchase products with the "Energy Star" label and weatherproof

their facilities to seeking contracts with energy companies along the lines of the British firms Good Energy Limited and Ecotricity, both of which provide 100% renewable electricity. A focus on transit issues will also be central, namely expanding access to public transportation.

Youth Violence

As a city councilor at-large, I will work to ensure that all of the funds that have been slated for the City of Boston under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act get channeled appropriately. The stimulus funds have already saved the jobs of hundreds of city employees, including our law enforcement officials. A commitment to public safety begins with a commitment to adequately funding those individuals that work on a daily basis to keep our city safe. Second, I believe that all students enrolled in the Boston Public Schools should have access to a designated mentor program. The efficacy of such programs has been well-established in other locales; the presence of a mentor and role model in the absence of parental supervision is critical to the wellbeing of our youth. Third, we must renew our commitment to funding the street workers program that has been so effective in the past.

I envisage a generation of young people who have access to a competitive education that teaches not only skills that will be vital in the workplace, but also the tolerance and compassion that can only come from education. To succeed in creating the schools of the 21st century in Boston, we must eliminate school busing and ensure that all students have access to neighborhood schools. This will enable increased parental involvement, an ingredient which is the cornerstone of any successful education. The money saved from the elimination of all unnecessary school transportation costs should be returned to those schools that are struggling the most. As well, in an age of ever-increasing diversity of all kinds, government needs to work with schools to help promote educational programs in diversity and tolerance, as well as foreign language programs that will arm students with a global worldview and an increased appreciation for other cultures.

Accountability, Transparency

First, I would propose that the City Council host, on a routine basis, a series of town-hall style forums in each one of Boston's neighborhoods. This would enable city residents to more directly interface with their councilors and give city councilors an opportunity to hear residents' concerns. As well, I believe that the City Council should create an online home in which residents can participate in online chats with their councilors as well as post feedback either to the body as a whole or particular elected officials. The revamped website would also post items currently on the Council's docket, including an explanation of the issues entailed and statements from members of the community in support of or opposed to particular proposals. As well, we need to fully harness the power of the latest city management technologies, such as Citistat, to make the delivery of constituent services more efficient and transparent.

Education

My top priority with respect to school transportation is increased access to neighborhood schools. Students are able to have more of a stake in their school when travel to and from school is not overly burdensome. As well, any outcomes of the debate should seek to increase parents' ability to be involved in their children's school. I see parental involvement as an essential component of advancing educational opportunity in Boston.

On some levels, the problem is a pedagogical one — teachers, at present, do not have the right tools to address the divergent needs of students that come from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Teachers must be trained in multicultural approaches to teaching, and regular diversity sensitivity workshops for teachers are essential. Primarily, though, the achievement gap in the BPS reflects an inequity of resources. More affluent neighborhoods are serviced by more well-endowed schools that have the facilities and tools necessary to facilitate a high level of education. We must focus on closing the resource gap if we hope to begin to address the achievement gap.

First and foremost, we need to create neighborhood schools where local students have access to local schools. As I mentioned in a prior response, the savings from the elimination of school transportation costs must be reinvested in our city's most struggling schools. Additionally, I would establish a New Teacher Grant program that would provide incentives to individuals just entering the teaching profession to take positions in the city's most struggling schools.

Human Services

I would use the funds to establish a medical clinic through a partnership between the City of Boston and a consortium of local health care facilities. The consortium would facilitate the pooling of Boston's extensive human capital and resources in the health care industry to help provide subsidized preventive care to those residents who may not otherwise be able to afford it. Such a clinic would ideally offer critical screenings such as HIV testing, a preventive measure which too often is not administered either due to physicians' reluctance to recommend it or a patient's inability to pay. Our city has a moral obligation to do what it can for those residents who struggle to pay for basic medical expenses.

Transportation

My number one priority would be to work closely with the various state transit authorities to develop a more solvent system that will be able to sustain current levels of service. The immediate goal of any member of city government at this juncture should be to ensure that public transit services are not cut, as this would have a deleterious impact on residents who rely on public transit as an environmentally-friendly and affordable means of transportation. One possible measure that I would look to implement would be the adoption of a prorated fare system similar to that used by the Washington, D.C. Metro.

Jobs and Labor

We can do a lot to promote employment by consolidating job training resources in the City of Boston. In this economic climate, we must do all we can to prevent disgruntled workers from exiting the labor force. The city needs to establish a website devoted to providing individuals with information about how to access job training services, advice, and also a database of employment websites.

Race and Diversity

One very promising alternative to affirmative action may be found in the model of Texas's ten percent law. Following challenges to the University of Texas system's affirmative action admissions policies, state lawmakers passed a law guaranteeing the opportunity of admission to all students in the top ten percent of their high school classes. A similar approach could be taken in the case of Boston's workforce. Quotas could be put in place mandating that a certain percentage of employees in state agencies come from certain neighborhoods. A similar approach could be applied in the case of evaluating promotions in public agencies based on performance on civil service examinations. As well, as part of an initiative to consolidate job-training resources, I would work to create a system of community liaisons in city agencies whose mission would be to help develop professional and leadership skills in communities that have historically been underprivileged and underrepresented in public institutions.

Budget Policy

Given the current budgetary crisis facing the City of Boston, the city would be remiss to not explore ways of working with tax-exempt institutions to increase revenues. While our city's universities, for example, all use the same services as non-tax-exempt establishments and individual residents, they are currently not paying their fair share in taxes. As city councilor, I would work with our city's tax-exempt institutions to increase their payments to the city.

Reductions from: HR, Auditing

Increases to: Education, Centers for Youth and Residents Jobs Policy

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