

2020 Newport RI City Council Candidates Questionnaire

TO: 2020 CANDIDATES FOR NEWPORT CITY COUNCIL
FROM: ALLIANCE FOR A LIVABLE NEWPORT
SUBJECT: ONLINE COUNCIL CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE
DATE: July 29, 2020

As ALN has done for every local election since 2008, a City Council candidates' questionnaire has been created as a means of assisting Newport voters in making their election choices. The accompanying Word document contains questions for this year's City Council candidates selected from submissions ALN has received.

At Large candidates are asked to respond to six (6) questions and Ward candidates to the same six (6) plus a seventh (7) Ward-specific question. Candidates are urged to limit their response to each question to no more than five hundred (500) words (unless otherwise specified) and to enter those responses online via Google Forms. Candidates can either enter their responses directly on Google Forms or formulate responses first using the Word document and then transferring those to Google Forms.

Responses must be received no later than the end of the day on August 8, 2020. As soon as possible after that date, all responses will be uploaded at the same time to the ALN website (www.newportalliance.org) and made available for public viewing with accompanying notifications to the public through ALN's email subscriber list (approximately 600 subscribers) and through advertising and promotion on local radio, print, and online media.

This year ALN is delighted to be joined with our 2020 Election partners, Newport This Week, The League of Women Voters, The Newport Chamber of Commerce, WADK Radio, Newport Buzz, and Channel 18 Community Television. This collaborative will be conducting live "Zoom" public forums to which you have already been invited.

If you have any questions about the questionnaire or the Google Forms procedures, please send an email to info@newportalliance.org and you will receive a quick response by email or phone, depending on the nature of the question. Do you still need help with the form or process? Contact Chip Leakas ALN board advisor (401)339-0777 mobile generally 9am-9pm

ALN commends each of you for choosing to run and serve for the Newport City Council and looks forward to hearing from you as to the pressing issues and challenges Newport faces today.

2020 CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE
Questions For All Council Candidates (At Large and Wards)

Email address *

bethcullen02840@gmail.com

First Name, Last Name *

Elizabeth Cullen

Elected Council Office you are seeking: *

Council "At Large" ▼

1.) Do you support the November ballot question for Newport to issue more than \$100million of bonds to be used to expand The Pell School and replace Rogers High School? If no, explain your reasons. If yes, what do you say to Newport residents and business owners concerned about the impact on their property taxes? If yes or no, what action(s) would you promote if the ballot question is defeated? *

Yes and NO! Had I been on the Council when they voted to approve placing the bond on the ballot, I would have stood against the contrived argument to combine the two.

Newport's young learners deserve a larger building. The plan to add to Pell at the cost of \$7.4 million should have been doubled. The elementary school should be large enough to house pre-kindergarten through 6th grade. (Our fifth and sixth graders are now at Thompson Middle School, bearing the academic and social/emotional costs.)

I do not support spending \$98.8 million on a new high school. What's presently proposed is designed for a small and shrinking student population. Siting the building on the hard-to-access Wickham Road location goes against every principle of economies of scale.

Many tout this ill-conceived plan will meet every consideration of today's and tomorrow's students. Rubbish! It will choke our city's fiscal standings, sparking the need for more unbridled, short-sighted hospitality developments. At what cost?

Others have attempted to sell the fanciful field of dreams concept, "build it, and they will come." More hogwash. Families do not choose to buy a home because of a new school. Families who can afford Newport's high real estate prices (yes, even for starter homes) do their homework! It is no secret, our district is exceptionally low-performing. New buildings will not magically heal that ailment. Only superior teaching and learning, supported by an excellent 21st-century curriculum, and buoyed by visionary leadership, can correct years of failings.

Perhaps the most egregious strong-arm tactic comes from those who say building a learning campus in the North End is red-lining! Nonsense! The idea that busing high school age kids to the south end of town, just so they can see how the other half lives, defies logic. As designed, this folly succeeds in one thing, maintaining the status quo to the delight of a selfish few.

Our students really need adults who can move beyond their Viking nostalgia. Let's help our kids get an excellent education that will prepare them for fruitful 21st Century futures. The future school should be a place where they are surrounded by professionalism and inspiration. It should be a place to earn the skills vital to thrive in an ever-evolving economy, whether pursuing a trade, a professional license, a military career, or aspiring to achieve advanced degrees. Let's commit ourselves to ensure that all students leave high school with the skills needed to thrive, not merely limp along.

We have short-term alternatives. Close Rogers, it has outlived its usefulness. Send students to Middletown, Portsmouth and North Kingstown. All have excess capacity and offer unique programs. Move quickly to enlarge Pell. Work with a new Middletown team to regionalize. Build a comprehensive career tech school to serve high school age and older students in need of up-skilling. This is the time for outside-the-box thinking. I'm committed to working with community partners across the island to elevate the conversation and explore every avenue that will lead to economic prosperity for all.

2.) Traffic and parking problems in Newport persist and seem to be getting worse despite being the subject of countless studies and ad hoc committees. What specific measures (other than forming more committees and conducting more studies) would you promote to alleviate the problems? *

The act of commissioning studies and forming committees to look at challenges and opportunities appears to be central to the city's DNA. Workable solutions exist, the answers lie within existing plans. Elements of the Newport Master Transportation Plan and North End Urban Plan first came to our attention in The Foundation for Newport's 1997 Harborfront Plan. Other viable studies sit on dusty shelves in City Hall. What is lacking is the "Can Do" confidence to act upon them.

The issue is not difficult to resolve if we think positively. We need to decide and act instead of continuing to analyze. Let us execute in steps, the top three suggestions of the committee. As demonstrated by the attendance at the February NBBJ workshop, citizens are committed to seeing action!

Let us also do the same for the waterfront and the beaches– using the Newport Waterfront Economic Study, What Will Newport's Waterfront Look Like in 2030, and the Newport Harbor Management Plan. With all these loose threads and untethered ideas, it is time for a professionally facilitated Strategic Plan.

More robust intra-Newport public transportation routes are needed. More buses to the beaches. Park & Rides and bike rental programs to alleviate traffic. People can park in the city's outskirts or the Visitor Center and take advantage of bike-share avails. Washington D.C.'s Capital Bikeshare, New York City's Citi Bike, San Francisco's Bay Wheels are good examples.

Other forms of multi-modal transportation (trolleys, autonomous vehicles like Providence's Little Roady, scooters, car shares, water taxis, etc.) must all become standard. Portions of Broadway and Thames Street should be considered as a pedestrian-only street between certain hours.

The city's Mary Street parking lot should be converted to an attractive multi-level garage. Several examples of how other historic destinations, where land is at a premium, have incorporated such structures into their downtowns. In Key West, St. Augustine, Monterey, and throughout European cities, smartly planned, eye-to-scale aesthetics, public parking structures can be found. Why not here?

These traffic and parking solutions must keep residents in mind, first and foremost, offering free and reduced fees at lots, meters, and on public transportation.

3.) Newport's economy is closely tied to tourism. The risk of that dependence has been made abundantly clear by the COVID pandemic. What, if any, alternatives do you see to the reliance on tourism? Based on your answer, what specific actions should be taken to further promote tourism and/or what specific actions should be taken to expand the economy beyond tourism? *

Over 20 years, study groups have warned Newport that its economy is too dependent on tourism, trumpeting the urgent need to diversify its economic base. Sadly we squandered much of that time by chasing quick-fix solutions, such as expanding gambling.

Amid COVID, we now have a timely opportunity to finally remake the island's economy. After all, we have an island problem and not just a Newport problem. Tourism should be only one leg of the economic stool. As a core focus, I will champion a healthier and more visible ecosystem around the "Blue Economy" and the defense sector. We have exceptional strength in both areas; it is a matter of expanding, not creating. I will spearhead the kind of focused, sustained execution of economic diversity, which has been lacking for decades.

Our tourism economy did not just get sick this year; there were earlier signs that it was starting to slow after the historical revenue growth of the last decade. The pandemic accelerated the decline. Let us use the COVID mess as our catalyst to push for positive change. So what can we do? Let's learn from other communities outside the U.S., like Venice and Barcelona, who have historically been tied to tourism. There's a new emerging concept where cities commit to growth by preserving their authenticity while celebrating their historic assets, postsecondary institutions, diversity, local culture, and charm.

Our recent spree of hotel building has taken over our cherished waterfront. It threatens the unique character which draws tourists and residents to Newport. We must prioritize the protection of our heritage and identity. Otherwise, history will remember Newport as an authentic jewel that became over-commercialized and ersatz, all in the name of greed. By working together, we can embrace these opportunities. The time has come to move in a new direction.

4.) The closure of the Visitors Center was announced recently. What do you propose should be done with the property? *

The abrupt closure of the Visitors Center creates an opportunity for the city to now own the projection of its image to visitors. This city property is a valuable asset. We do not need it to become the next dull Newport hotel complex, mixed with seasonal retail. The past studies that suggested these particular uses should be tossed into the shredder.

With Discover Newport abandoning the welcome point for our historic city, the city should take it over as a community economic development asset that is more than just a welcome center. The facility should be about discovering the whole community. We should be presenting a broader view of Newport's heritage, culture, and Blue Economy.

My vision would be to capture visitors' cars in a modernized parking structure and give our visitors a vibrant, immersive visitor experience. We could be showcasing our growing "Blue Economy" sector, our city's unique 17th, 18th, and 19th Century cultural destinations, Fort Adams, our rich naval history, from Capt Cook's ship HMB Endeavour sunk in our harbor, America's Cup, Goat Island's Torpedo Station, to the famous U.S. Naval War College. It's time we head in a new direction with new leaders championing the art-of-the-possible.

5.) A Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) template is being considered as part of the North End Urban Plan (NEUP). What would you like to see included in the CBA template? What measures will you promote and support to put the NEUP on a clear path to implementation? *

First, allow me to thank all those who, despite the pandemic's unforeseen disruption, worked so hard to craft a well-thought-out and creative vision for our city's North End. Since we purchased our home, adjacent to the Newport Bridge, in 1991, I have found the area to be blighted in many spots and incredibly pedestrian-unfriendly. Participating in NBBJ's many meetings and workshops has elevated my hopes for this somewhat neglected section of our city.

I agree with the use of the Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) and have long advocated for CBAs when other projects have been on the table, the Casino expansion, for one. Such tools have been in use around the county for 30 years. I've found it surprising that Newport's leaders have been reluctant to use them.

To be successful, a CBA must be broad-based and highly inclusive of all stakeholders. The coalition must include residents, environmental, faith-based, labor organizations, and area business and nonprofit leaders. Developments can cause gentrification, push out low-income residents as housing prices rise, or create only low wage, service sector jobs. A well-orchestrated CBA will lessen these unwarranted outcomes.

Newport's brand is valuable; developers know this. We should be using CBAs to fund improvements that benefit our neighborhoods. The related concept -- "tax increment financing" -- could support bonds used for larger community projects like a "lifelong skills learning" center, a North End fire station, affordable housing, and new city parks.

Maximizing the value of the NEUP is going to require a cultural mind shift inside city hall. The time has come to take action. We certainly don't need this smarter-growth plan to end up on the dusty city shelves. Effective implementation means having more visionary council members with the time, talent, and tenacity to serve and lead. It also means having councilors comfortable delegating power and responsibility to new board and commission members. NBBJ's Alan Mountjoy strongly recommended that during his closing remarks in his July 30th NEUP presentation, their proposed "design review group" actually needs teeth. This review group would be composed of area experts: historians, architects, planners, landscape designers, etc. Delegating power may be our biggest challenge.

6.) What do you most want Newport voters to know about you? (Limit response to a maximum of 250 words.)

Elect me, and you will have "hired" a seasoned public servant ready to do the job on Day One! My campaign tagline is: "Time, Talent, and Tenacity."

If elected, I will have the TIME to devote to my work as a City Councilor, representing you and working full time to improve our great city. Our son Mac will be heading off to college in 2021, the nest will be officially empty.

By TALENT, I mean, civic experience. I will take the lessons I've learned over the last 25 years involved in a myriad of organizations as a community volunteer, to include: Chairing the City's Personnel Appeals Board; Vice-Chair of the Newport Public Education Foundation; President of the Point Association; Executive Board member of the UMass Dartmouth Kaput Center, and as the co-founder of the Rhode Island STEAM Academy, to hit the ground running working for you. A full listing of my civic activities can be found at: <http://www.beth02840.com/resume>

My TENACITY speaks for itself. I am a high-energy person. I do my homework and focus on best practices. Too often, elected leaders fall prey to shopworn excuses. I promise to challenge indifference and seek solutions. My dad, the late Albert McManus was a 1939 graduate of Rogers; he joined the Seabees in WWII. Their motto is "Can-Do!" I promise to carry forward that "Can Do!" spirit in all my efforts as a member of the Newport City Council.

7a.) Question For Third Ward Council Candidates ONLY ::: Ocean Drive is the scene of traffic problems, speeding, illegal parking, and (primarily at Bretton State Park) loud noise and trash. Although these problems are at their worst during the summer months, they persist to some degree throughout the year. What specific measures would you promote to deal with these problems?

7b.) Question For Second Ward Council Candidates ONLY ::: The intersection of Rhode Island Avenue and Memorial Boulevard is the scene of congestion and multiple accidents every summer. The traffic overflow from the north to Memorial is now affecting Red Cross and Gibbs as well. What measures should be adopted to handle this problem?

7c.) Question For First Ward Council Candidates ONLY ::: The preferred plan for the Pell Bridge Offramp Realignment is now known. What measures should the City of Newport plan and enact to minimize disruption to the surrounding neighborhoods both during construction and, more importantly, after project completion?

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