

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 *

First Name, Last Name *

Elected Council Office you are seeking: *

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? *

With the School Construction Bond on the ballot this year, we have the opportunity and responsibility to give future generations of Newporters the education, tools, and opportunities they need to carry on after us. Moving forward with the bond at this time is the most fiscally responsible and prudent option for Newport. We have to think long term. Municipal bond interest rates are nearing 0%, the state will reimburse over \$50 million of the \$100 million bond, and it will bring construction jobs to Newport. Once the building is complete, the Newport Area Career and Technical Center programs will be even more competitive and continue to attract students from other high schools. It will also produce students ready to go out into the real world and find good jobs.

Because of the clear need and clear benefits, I support the bond question to fund a new high school and build an extension on to the Pell Elementary School. Our community cannot be successful without a strong school system. Rogers High School was neglected for decades and that led to it being ranked the worst school building in the entire state. In 2018, a state ballot question was approved to spend tax dollars on school improvement; it passed with 84% in Newport. The state funding is available to us now – and it has an expiration date. Going forward, the cost of building a new school building will only increase. We cannot afford to wait for Middletown to change their mind, and we cannot afford to ship our students around the state for decades.

I introduced a resolution this term that explicitly instructs the City Administration to come up with multiple ways to implement a homestead exemption for our full-time residents, lowering their tax payments. Those options are due back to the Council in December. This will give the Council ample time to understand the options and to engage the public in a decision so that it can be implemented as soon as possible. A new high school will also increase home values because a strong school system strengthens the community around it.

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? *

In order to truly address our traffic issues in Newport, we need to implement mechanisms that will remove cars from our roads. That means improving and increasing public transportation options and improving the walkability and bike-ability of our sidewalks and streets. Newport can and should establish itself as a top tier bike friendly community – this will improve the roadway experience for all users and help increase the safety of our roads. RIPTA is interested in increasing routes in Newport and it would benefit both our carless residents and help remove cars from the roads.

Additionally, we must reduce the need to bring a car into Newport, which requires increasing access to public transportation. It must be easy, inexpensive, and quick to park outside of downtown and shuttle in, and to get around the city without a car. Part of this will occur when the Pell Bridge Ramp realignment project is complete, but the City must be committed to carrying on and improving that work.

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? *

Newport's hospitality and tourism industry is a cornerstone of our economy and I am committed to working with our businesses to strengthen and rebuild during this pandemic and in the recovery, just as I was during the 2019 gas outage. Our City government needs to work with State departments and officials to make sure that businesses are given support they need to withstand the current downturn and be able to grow in the future.

Newport's longstanding connection with the Navy continues to grow and evolve. We have the Navy Tech Bridge Northeast centered at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, which focuses on accelerating new technologies from concept to prototype to commercial scale. NUWC and the City of Newport have signed a technology sharing agreement, and NUWC continues to grow and employ more engineers, scientists, and technicians. This anchors the defense industry in the area as well, hosting thousands of additional private sector professionals. The Naval War College is home to world class scholars and students, and brings families from around the globe to Newport, enriching our community.

The work to grow additional sectors of our economy must also continue. Innovate Newport is a great example of what is possible – multiple high-tech, growing businesses sharing a building together and employing Newport residents. Part of what needs to be done to continue growing like this is make Newport a more affordable and appealing place for families to live. Building a new high school and improving our school system will support this, as will a homestead exemption.

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

The Gateway Center has long served as a transportation hub, with the Visitors' Center sharing the space. I believe that it is important to maintain a transportation hub at the location. Part of improving Newport's long-term viability needs to include increased and improved access to public transportation for both residents and visitors. The shared use path that is being installed as part of the Pell Bridge Ramp realignment is planned to end at the Gateway Center. Visitors and residents must have options for how to get around the City once they get there.

There are many options that could fit into the Gateway Center property and we need to have open, public discussions as a Council and with community members to understand and evaluate those options. We need to do our homework, as a community. There has already been interest expressed in the building, but I do not want us to make the mistake of rushing in and not doing what is right for Newport and our residents.

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? *

Any Community Benefits Agreement template developed as part of the North End Urban Plan must include provisions that allow for third-party organizations, such as community groups and neighborhood associations, to participate in the negotiations along with the City and the developers. I want our approach to economic development to be people-first. The negotiations need to include working to require benefits such as job training, living wages, open space, and more. It should also include measures to improve the daily lives of the families and children of the area. After the Comprehensive Land Use Plan was approved in 2017, no action was taken to turn the goals of the plan into new ordinances that would actually reshape the future of Newport. That work began in my term as Chair and it will continue with the North End Urban Plan. The Plan is meant to be a community vision for the North End and set a path towards connecting the North End with downtown Newport. In order to realize that vision, the drafting and passage of new ordinances must begin immediately after passage of the Plan.

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

As an engineer I have been trained to solve complex challenges and it is my pleasure to bring that skill set to the City Council. I take my time and prepare for all of our meetings and workshops, and I take pride in that. I have not voted on anything in my time on the Council without thoroughly reading and understanding it.

During my time as Chair, I have made both transparency and debate a priority. Meeting times have extended dramatically under my leadership and all Council discussion and decisions takes place on the floor, in front of the public. This is especially important when the Council is discussing topics that are delicate or uncomfortable to talk about. I'm proud of the discussions that occur between the Council and the public. I believe the votes we cast and the reasoning behind them should be clear to our residents. This is why I send out a weekly newsletter discussing the Council meetings and digging into issues. When there is expansive discussion and explanation by the Council, it makes our government more open and approachable.

I want to bring that approach to our City's budget process. There have been many, vocal calls for changes to our City budget and that can only be successfully accomplished by making sure that our budget is clear and understandable for ALL our residents. I have begun researching Participatory Budget processes to see how we can improve how our budget is developed, discussed, and voted on.

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?

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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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