

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? *

Yes, I support the bond. As most residents are all too aware, our high school is structurally unsound, and in worse condition than any other high school in the state, according to a 2017 study. To attract and retain families to Newport, we need to begin with quality schools. As a homeowner, I am relieved the bond is also the most economical solution for taxpayers, because a state grant would fund up to 52.5 percent of the project cost. Due to the poor condition of the school, the grant would not cover repairs, which would cost Newport \$72 million. However, the \$106 million bond would end up costing taxpayers between \$50.4 and \$68.9 million, depending on the final grant amount. In addition to the high school, the bond will also allow us to expand Pell Elementary and give our pre-k students a home. However, if voters don't approve the bond, another municipality will receive the grant money and the tax burden will be higher on our residents. I believe Newport residents want a strong community and will support this bond. However, if it is defeated, the alternative of dispersing our students to other districts is not an option that I would support. We would have to find another way to give our children a school they deserve.

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 city's current proposal to significantly hike parking tickets is short-sighted, as it does not offer solutions to the problem. Parking tickets shouldn't be established as a critical revenue stream, as it makes the city dependent on the problem. Newport is a walkable community, and the first step is to encourage our day visitors to park and enjoy Newport by foot. As an immediate step, we should provide free day parking at the Gateway Center, along with a "Walk Newport" campaign, including signage, to encourage people to park and walk. The city should also partner with the hotels and the Preservation Society to provide reliable, free transportation to popular areas, attractions and the beach. As a longer term approach, we should consider creative solutions, such as working with the Town of Middletown to create a walkable path around the Easton's Point reservoir. This would allow pedestrians to enjoy a pleasant walk from northern Newport to First Beach, through Middletown. Also looking longer term, we should prioritize solutions to make Newport, and Aquidneck Island, more bike friendly. Once we provide solutions to traffic and parking, we can look at enforcement and steeper fines.

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? *

While Innovate Newport was a great concept intended to attract new industries to Newport, I am disappointed the city is now just another commercial landlord. As existing leases are set to expire, the city should return to the mission of providing an incubator to emerging businesses that would diversify Newport's economy. I have built a business outside of the tourism industry, and the unresolved challenges facing businesses nearly pushed my business to Providence. Young Newport businesses face a shortage of commercial space, poor broadband, and parking/traffic issues. The city and current council has largely ignored the business community in recent years, despite unprecedented challenges such as the week-long gas outage and COVID. If we want to provide sustainable jobs outside of tourism, the city needs to listen to business and take action to resolve these barriers.

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

The Visitor's Center is a unique location that could host many concepts that would benefit the city. Artists are attracted to Newport, but few make Newport their home because of the lack of studio and gallery space. The Visitor's Center could be converted into a shared studio/gallery space for artists and galleries. There should be a public studio space, to provide art education to adults and children. This concept would diversify Newport's economy, attract new families, quality visitors and provide a unique opportunity for community education and recreation. It is a concept both residents and new businesses could enjoy year-round.

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 development in the North End must be carefully considered, as it's a special part of Newport that has been preserved. My son has played at Miantonomi Park since he was a baby, as we love the wide open space, and the walking trails. The future will never regret preserving open space. Therefore when considering the NEUP, whether it is through panning/zoning or a CBA, we should be careful not to overdevelop the area. Once we lay pavement, development not something that is reversed.

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

As a business owner, mother and homeowner, the issues I wrote about for nearly 10 years as a reporter, directly impacted my family and photography studio. Putting down my pen as a reporter to run for office, was a difficult decision. I am running because the city of Newport needs leadership and a council that will work together. I am running because I have not seen a solution-focused council in recent history. How has the existing council made Newport a more livable city? What has the council done for families? How have recent councils supported business through unprecedented challenges such as the gas outage and COVID? We need elected officials who are willing to roll up their sleeves and do the work. When I declared my candidacy, that is what I signed up to do. When I say that I want to see the proposed skatepark become a reality for our kids – that means I'm ready to organize fundraisers. When I say I want our parks to stay clean – that means I will supply the gloves and bags, and organize cleanups. I'm running to do the work.

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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