

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 *

RHussey02840@gmail.com

First Name, Last Name *

Rachel Hussey

Elected Council Office you are seeking: *

Council "Third Ward" ▼

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? *

Personally, I would have liked to see the questions presented individually for each school, but since it has been determined to be a single question I do support bringing the final decision to the voters. To the residents & business owners concerned with the impact on their taxes, I would say show up on November 3rd and vote against it. Amid a pandemic threatening the very way we understand "school," and with digital learning on the rise, if the question is defeated, I believe the silver lining would be the opportunity of more time to discuss other, creative options in more depth; including meeting with other, potentially new Town Councils to discuss merging, to redefining the grades at the current Pell and Thompson schools while finalizing an economic plan for the high school.

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? *

As a renter myself, I've had to grapple with parking firsthand for years. One issue I have on my street is large areas of parking without demarcations of the spacing, so when one car parks "out of line", it forces later cars to park haphazardly and minimizes spaces. This could be remedied by drawing lines for each space in these areas of "pick your own spot" street parking.

A solution in other cities I've visited is to introduce parking apps, accessible from smartphones with available spot listings, and options to add time to their meter remotely. This solution would eliminate the risk involved with touching current parking meters and using change, pertinent during a coin shortage. This would also collect data on what spaces are most popular and at what times of the day & year are most sought after.

Other states have also fostered relationships with areas that have the potential to be "mixed use lots," such as libraries, grocery stores, or church parking lots after hours. Also, with the NEUP potentially underway, access to those areas from the furthest wards should be non-negotiable. By creating symbiotic relationships between the city and the businesses, we could create more parking with existing spaces in popular areas.

I would also suggest that the city as a whole needs more public transportation. Ideally, Newport could have more trolley lines for locals to use throughout the city, not just from the gateway center to the mansions, but to the farmers market, the beach, Thames street & Broadway, among other popular destinations for locals. The trollies, more aesthetically fitting to the city than the standard busses, would be most appropriate and lend to the charm of the city. I should mention, when there is construction and multiple (5+) spots are taken over by construction equipment in the heart of downtown, that doesn't help the situation either.

Finally, if numerous commissions & studies have been formed & conducted in the past, I think it would behoove us to re-examine the best parts of said commissions & studies and see if we can't make them work together.

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? *

In order to scale down Newport's reliance on tourism, she first off needs to attract more families. With children, they will be present in the city 10 months of the year, paying property and education taxes, shopping for school & home items, while working parents and young workers would contribute to a lower unemployment. With the school bond, and futures of the students and the schools themselves, up in the air, marketing Newport for said population is an uphill battle. However, if Newport can come up with innovative and attractive answers to age-old questions, and prove to draw families, the middle class, and young people, that would be a better reason to revisit rebuilding Rogers completely versus trying to merge. A growth in Newport's school-age population might also incentivize another town to merge in the future as well, so there are many upsides to attracting more families, not just to ease the city's reliance on tourism.

I think Newport's tourism has always been well promoted, but with the pandemic upon us, with fewer tourists and more time to reflect on big, yet solvable problems, we need to use this time wisely to come to creative & concrete answers. The citizens and the businesses deserve solutions. If that means increasing our technological footprint, either with streamlined parking or visitor information apps, to draw younger folks and people wary of germs into our city again, I think it would be worth the investment.

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

Shocking & saddening news to me, off the bat it seems a difficult location to re-purpose; bus-hub adjacent, one or 2 large rooms, and tough with parking unless the lot structure is included. But with my thoughts on attracting younger, middle class families, I envision it being most helpful as an outlet for children in some way. Perhaps a smart play space for toddlers, or indoor playground, to foster not only developmental & experiential learning, but to also have a place during the winter to bring children in lieu of outdoor parks in inclement weather. Providing bathrooms, changing stations, and maybe a "haven" for parents to get snacks or drinks in the old waiting area, and a place to get settled after arriving via bus, would be a marketing point for parental visitors and locals alike.

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?" *

There are many items I would like to see considered as part of CBA template to the NEUP. I tuned into a recent meeting regarding more specifics of the project, and was happy to hear acknowledgement of what Newport citizens would need to move forward, as derived from community input collection. Personally, I would urge them to consider increased chances for local, minority, & women owned businesses to set up shop, while also ensuring year round job opportunities with livable wages for locals. Additionally, green spaces, options to alleviate traffic, and keeping within the architectural aesthetic of the city should be priority while doing so. Accessibility is another concern; those living in Ward 3 furthest from the project should be able to easily access the NEUP locations, either by trolley, bike/pedestrian path, or something similar, and those who want more information on the details of the plan should have easy access to those as well.

In the same vein of transparency, I am firmly behind the idea that any construction go out to bid whenever possible, to create a fair and economical competition to earn our tax dollars for the labor. And finally, I believe the city should have a guaranteed benefit of some sort from the NEUP, whether monetary or otherwise.

As for putting the NEUP on a "clear track to implementation," as long as the people of ward 3 are comfortable with the economic and ancillary impacts, plus any hurdles it must overcome, I will vote to move it forward.

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

Ward 3 is my only special interest. What this means is that I will sacrifice my personal predilections to represent the will of the ward.

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?

In my experience, Ocean Drive isn't the only scene of these issues; they are citywide. Are they all solvable? To some extent. Are there perfect solutions to each? No, but there are remedies.

To counter speeding, speed bumps and other traffic calming tactics at specific locations could be beneficial, such as removing crumbling sidewalks and flattening the walking area so that cars can still veer to the side of a narrow 2-way street if necessary. This would be a nice option if the city ever decides to bury unsightly utility lines, as construction could all be done at one time (unlike the out-of-sync Broadway road/utility construction that was once a point of contention). Another technique is installing driver feedback signs that calculate times of day & locations that most need police presence to deter it.

As for illegal parking, it is our right to call tow companies and ticket when appropriate, but there also must be clear signage so as not to confuse motorists. There is a couple in my ward who has placed "No Parking" signs in their own windows because a city sign was taken down & never replaced (they said they've contacted the city numerous times about it), and not only does it leave open whether one can truly park there or not, it has also left a gaping hole in the sidewalk dangerous to pedestrians.

Traffic problems can be tackled with creative solutions I've mentioned above (if parking is easier, people won't be circling to find spaces and causing a majority of congestion), and if signage is clear where lacking, this will help as well. Because I'm not versed on what areas are more susceptible to traffic problems than others, I cannot comment on a case-by-case basis, but would welcome the opportunity to do so.

The loud noises and trash, although abundant at Bretton State Park, are also a citywide issue. So much so, that a local, Joseph Fitzpatrick, recently took matters into his own hands and raised money to combat the overflow of rubbish. While this is a kind gesture from a resident, it should not be his responsibility to privately tackle a public issue! Ultimately, I believe we need more receptacles in more locations, and they need to be emptied even more often. We should also be promoting recycling, even to restaurants and resident buildings with more than 10 apartments, who are currently exempt from a recycling requirement. And the loud noises? Well I find most of them are from engines around Ocean Drive. Unfortunately, those types of noise are often regulated, and can be ticketed if above a certain level, however if it is within the lawful parameters and during appropriate times of day, it's very difficult to regulate it further. If there are other noise complaints beyond the engines at Brenton Point State Park, I welcome discussions around them and possible solutions!

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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