

# 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](http://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](mailto: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? \*

I do support the ballot question. What I say to our residents and business owners who are concerned, is that this has been a tough decision. The bottom line is that Newport needs to demonstrate that we are prepared to invest in education – this is a critical message to send to our students, and to businesses and people who might consider moving here. We just need to spend the money intelligently, and keep our eye on educational outcomes. We need to ensure that a new building supports improved outcomes with classroom design that has been tested and proven successful. We should innovate, but we should be careful about another “experimental” design like the current Rogers High School was in its day.

Our Finance Director released a report in July showing the short-term impacts on property taxes would not be onerous. Because of the structure of municipal bonds the bulk of the impact on taxes would occur in the first five years and level off after that, using a combination of short-term notes to begin and shifting to long-term bonds as direct expenses with the construction reach their peak, anticipated in years 3 and 4. We couldn't ask for a more favorable financial climate for borrowing so we can anticipate financing the debt at a low rate of interest. At this time we anticipate a rate of 52.5% reimbursement from the state.

The July report from the Finance Director projected a total impact on a \$400,000 home of \$156, graduating to \$312 for an \$800,000 home and \$585 for a \$1.5 million home. The impact on a \$1.5 million business is projected to be \$870. This total impact figure would not be reached until 2025; the increases would be incremental in 2022, 2023, and 2024, reaching the figures I've cited in the year 2025. A new school represents faith in our future, and “smart money” would counsel us to invest now.

The unknowns include the impact of the Covid pandemic on our local businesses and our economy, as well as the budget for the state of RI. The projections I cite above are based on the assumption that the state of RI will reimburse the expenditures on new schools at a rate of 52.5%.

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? \*

I introduced the resolution to commission a Master Transportation Plan last September, which passed 7-0. The Request for Proposals was prepared by the Planning Department after vetting the issues with representatives from a wide range of community organizations including the HEZ Transportation Group, the Hill Association, the Point Association, Discover Newport, the Preservation Society, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission, the Cliff Walk Commission, and the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission.

If I am reelected I will work to ensure that the Master Transportation Plan benefits from widespread community input and takes a fresh look at all the issues facing Newport's transportation problems. I also worked with community groups before presenting the resolution for the city to implement a Green and Complete Streets ordinance. I would expect to see those principles reflected in the Master Transportation Plan.

We now have a revitalized Planning Department which is more than capable of guiding the implementation of such a plan. I believe the time is right and the community is ready to move forward to address these problems, particularly as the Pell Bridge Ramp redesign is fleshed out and we see more detail in that proposal.

I will seriously consider the recommendations in the Master Transportation Plan. My own input to the process would include these ideas:

- genuinely user-friendly, affordable, convenient and attractive public transportation, addressing both tourists' needs and the needs of residents of the city who want public transportation to get downtown;
- alternative transportation avenues for bicycles and pedestrians that will lure people to shopping and recreation;
- public parking so that tourist traffic to Newport can be rerouted and when tourists leave their cars they will enjoy using public transport to get around,;
- the possibility of weekly or monthly parking for residents who don't need their cars on a daily basis, in an effort to free up parking space on our streets; and
- all proposals must recognize and address our need for resiliency in the face of sea level rise and storm surges.

My philosophy is that Newport was not originally designed for the automobile traffic we see today, and we should honor our history. We should implement plans which de-emphasize reliance on single-occupancy vehicles. We should take a hard look at the expectations underlying convenient street parking and ask if there are better alternatives. I'm an avid reader of Jeff Speck, who promotes walkable cities.

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? \*

With the impact of the Covid pandemic, I seek opportunities to do things differently in the future, to address the underlying needs which have been laid bare by the pandemic.

As an alternative to tourism, we need to make smart investments sending a message that we support our local businesses as they seek to grow and thrive. Prominent among these needs is 21st Century high speed internet. City government should work with our state representatives to expand service from the "middle mile" of fiber optics which runs approximately from Newport Hospital down Broadway to City Hall. Currently our connectivity is based on cable. That's older technology, and Cox maintains it reactively. An upgrade to fiber optics should lead to increased availability of high-speed internet at a more affordable rate because Cox would face competition. This would not only support distance learning for our students but would also send a message to businesses which are considering locating here, with the need to be able to rely on sophisticated technology infrastructure.

I've been a leader in the city's response to the pandemic. To support our tourism industry I presented the resolution to require masks on our busy streets, and I organized the Zorro Brigade, a band volunteers who are out on America's Cup, Thames, Bellevue and the Cliff Walk, passing out masks provided by the City, on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. I don't believe those who work in the tourist industry should have to ask people to put masks on in order to be safe at work. I believe we have a responsibility to protect these workers.

I support finding a way to turn more street space over to expanded outdoor dining so that our restaurants can increase their capacity and get back to making a profit.

I also think we should market Newport as a safe destination for people who want to come here and feel safe, and we should ramp up testing capability to allow for weekly testing of those working in the hospitality industry – and when we have that in place we should advertise that in the region to promote tourism. This would set Newport apart as a tourist destination. (Please see my response to the question regarding the Visitors Center for further expansion of marketing Newport as a tourist destination.)

I also believe that we need to preserve the little that remains of our working waterfront with a waterfront zone, and place my faith in a solid urban planning process to ensure orderly growth that promotes sustainability, and allows for the preservation of our waterfront. I believe our waterfront is our ultimate tourist attraction in dire need of protection.

Finally, we should remember how we were blindsided by the pandemic as a city, state, and nation, and learn from the experience. Our city administration has responded effectively, as it did during the natural gas outage. However, I would like to see a mechanism for public input as part of the process for continual assessment of our disaster preparedness.

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

There are many opportunities to consider for the Visitors Center, and I will bring an open mind to the question as we move forward, but the idea most intriguing to me at this point is the opportunity to take a fresh approach to marketing tourism in Newport. Our beaches and bars are overcrowded. What makes Newport unique is our history – in so many aspects, whether architecture, sporting history with sailing, golf, and tennis, or colonial history and the history of Newport's relationship with the slave trade, currently being brought to life through the Newport Middle Passage Port Markers Project and the RI Slave Medallions Project. Given the shift to online travel research and planning it makes sense to combine, in the ground floor space, the museum function of the Newport Historical Society together with the tourist services offered by Discover Newport. Newport is rich in educational experiences available to those coming on vacation and we should strive to teach our visitors about our history. If all the tourist attractions in Newport could be gathered under the "roof" of the Newport Historical Society's museum and shop, these attractions could be perceived in their historical context.

The Visitors Center also enjoys a prime central location which is already well established as the first stop in town for tourists. As such, I would like to see it bolstered as a hub for public transportation, depending on the recommendations of the Master Transportation Plan when it is completed. (Please see my response to the question regarding Traffic and Parking.) This area could be the central hub where visitors let go of their cars and begin to rely on a user-friendly public transportation system.

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?" \*

The CBA concept embodies my major reason for first running in 2016. I became First Ward councilor that year with the mission to bring forward the voice of the community that would feel the greatest impact from development in the North End in conjunction with the Pell Bridge Ramp redesign. There are other communities who feel the impact, including the Tradesmen, the Swamp, and the Point, but I saw that the population in the North End north of Admiral Kalbfus was especially lacking a direct voice in civic affairs. Four years later we're discussing incorporating a process that could ensure community engagement in large scale development, with benefits that could range from a minimum wage guarantee, paid the workers who are hired for operations, to funding of a community space.

My core issue is to support the planning process, and I credit the expertise of our consultants, NBBJ, and our Planning Department and Planning Board, and I look forward to seeing the final draft of the NEUP, probably later this month. This process, and this product are the rationale for supporting the moratorium last September. I'll work to see that the Council adopts the North End Urban Plan even if it requires modification. If the NEUP is in conflict with any portion of our Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP, adopted in 2017) we should update the CLUP. I will push for that to proceed. The final step is to bring our zoning into compliance. This is where, I believe, the CBA process would be enshrined.

The concept of CBA is essential because the time has come to leave behind the systemic marginalization of our communities that are uniquely impacted by the structural nature of income inequality. The CBA delivers on its promise when a community organizes and present its needs and wishes to a developer. This offers a win-win and allows predictability for the developer. The challenge is organizing a coalition of community groups that can speak for their constituents, educating those constituents regarding the nature and impacts of the proposals, and securing legal representation for the coalition so the negotiations with the developer can be done on a more level playing field. I'm still exploring the mechanisms for how this could best be done; I think of approaching the RWU Law School for pro bono assistance as I'm familiar with the clinical model in which students take on representation under the supervision of a law professor. I believe it's essential that the negotiations be done independent of the planning review and council approval process, so that they occur between two arm's length parties. I've discovered in my study of CBA's that government officials shouldn't be deeply engaged in the negotiation process, to avoid legal challenges by the developer.

An alternative would be to build some baseline community benefits into our zoning scheme. We could also require as a baseline that the developer produce Community Impact Reports. All of these zoning tools, however, require intensive engagement with community organizations to be successful.

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

My parents grew up in England in a setting which was not automobile-centric. My father became an accountant and my mother an architect. WWII was the defining event in their lives, my father serving six years on the front in North Africa and Asia, holding the rank of Major when he was demobilized, while my mother lived through bombing raids and food rationing. Ultimately they immigrated to Seattle and founded a successful landscape design and construction business. I grew up amid conversation about how homes and gardens and structures and neighborhoods should fit together, how people move through space, and especially how deference to cars diminishes neighborhoods and cities. I bring to my seat on the Council a lifelong sensitivity to thoughtful urban planning and design.

I myself became a lawyer, advocating on behalf of individuals with immigration needs and civil rights issues for over 30 years, in Seattle, New York, and Rhode Island. I went into law to represent people whose voices were marginalized, often by overzealous government action.

On the Council I bring an independent voice. The major projects now in our sights require thoughtful planning and design that works for every sector of our community. I work to ensure engaged participation – from design professionals, entrepreneurs and small business people, and particularly those in the North End whose quality of life will be directly impacted by development there. Newport's diversity is our strength and with good planning we can celebrate that.

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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