

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

CITY COUNCIL – AT-LARGE

Question 1: Why are you running for City Council and what specific skills do you think you would bring to the position?

Jess Falero: I'm running because we need more people on the Council who understand, due to their lived experience, that the rent is too high, wages are too low, our shelters are packed, and we are entirely unprepared for climate change. As a City Councilor, I will focus on these priorities. I am hopeful that if we stay focused on making this city affordable for everyone, we can make the changes necessary to protect our great city.

Ben Grant: I am running to bring energy, enthusiasm, and experience to the work of building a livable, affordable City for everyone who wants to live here in our vibrant community. We need to be bolder in addressing the housing crisis, and the Council also needs to replace two members with significant experience with the school system - so we can continue to fund PPS appropriately. I have developed a lot of important skills over 25 years in politics, the law, and government. The most important is to treat everyone with respect, while at the same time advocating for your ideas and values. Today's adversary might be tomorrow's ally - so don't burn bridges.

Grayson Lookner: Because Portland must be a city where everyone who works here can afford to live here. I have spent four years in the state legislature working to address the housing crisis, and through that I've seen how Portland could do so much more to create affordable housing across the board. We can create a "social housing developer," in the style of Montgomery County, Maryland, where the city finances and develops mixed-income housing using bonds. This will create below market rate units and will generate revenue that can in turn be put towards more housing or services for our neighbors on the street, all without raising taxes. I believe I'm the candidate with the most experience on "housing policy." I put that in quotes, because we don't have one congruent policy or set of policies when it comes to housing. Housing can be a complex and even byzantine issue, and we need someone on city council who knows the ins-and-outs of state and local policy. What works, what doesn't, what is counter-productive, and what conflicts. Housing doesn't have to be so complicated. We can build the type of housing we need without sacrificing our neighborhood history or our city's culture and character. That's why I think I'm the best candidate for City Council.

Brandon Mazer: I am running for the City Council to bring a more balanced, inclusive viewpoint representative of all the voices of Portland. My experience on the Planning Board and as a land use lawyer for towns and cities across the state has given me invaluable insight and knowledge about municipal government which will allow me to effectively serve the residents of Portland. Known for my common sense, cooperative approach to solving problems, I strongly believe I can make a difference in addressing the unprecedented challenges facing our city and is what is needed right now. If elected, I will not have a "learning curve" and will be able to hit the ground running on day 1 - ready to listen and work hard on behalf of all Portland residents!

Jake Viola: I am running for City Council because I'm embarrassed by what's happening to Portland. I'm embarrassed by the needles that litter our parks. I'm embarrassed by our out-of-touch Councilors who disregard the views of the majority. I'm embarrassed by the runaway spending that makes living here unaffordable. Portland residents deserve better. But we cannot expect change by

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

electing the same people who've been serving for years in city government positions. I am the only candidate who offers a new voice. And I have the skills and experience to make positive change for Portland. I've spent the past decade in strategy and operations fixing failing projects, leading through crises, and bringing people together to implement innovative policies. Before that, I was an entrepreneur. I understand the courage it takes to start a small business and the impact bad policies have on our economy.

Question 2: What are the top 3 challenges facing the city and how would you address them?

Jess Falero: The number one way we can confront the affordable housing crisis in the short term is strengthening and enforcing rent control. As we continue trying to build our way out of this crisis—by building the thousands of affordable units we need to keep this city livable—we have to protect those who live here from the price gouging of our past. (The 2nd challenge is to) broaden property tax relief through the P-STEP program to all working class and low-income families in Portland. (The 3rd is to) create a shelter system that treats each individual with respect and that gets them the help they need.

Ben Grant: Housing, education, and general affordability. We need to be open to a smart, all-of-the-above approach to building more housing. We need to invest in our schools so we can continue to provide an excellent education for all - and to promote lifelong learning outside of the K-12 system. Finally, we need to make Portland affordable in various ways - including more housing supply, attracting good jobs to the city, paying well for public jobs, and working with the State on tax reform.

Grayson Lookner: Unaffordable housing, people experiencing homelessness due to unaffordable housing, maintaining excellent city services and education, and identifying new sources of revenue in order to do so.

Brandon Mazer: The three major issues facing the City are housing, public safety, and property taxes. This has been confirmed by what I am hearing from the community as I campaign across the city. While none of these issues have quick, simple solutions, there are a number of ways to begin addressing these concerns – on housing, for example, incentivizing the creation of more affordable housing and simplifying the city permitting process as well as closing the loophole on converting housing to hotels; on public safety, for example, prohibiting homeless individuals from sleeping in public spaces and parks; and on property taxes we need to relieve the burden on the taxpayers and seek alternative revenue sources such as a local option tax.

Jake Viola: The 1st challenge is unsustainable spending and high property taxes. We cannot afford such large property tax increases year after year. I would prioritize city and school needs, understand short and long-term spending impacts, and demonstrate the return on our investments. The 2nd challenge is public health and safety due to encampments and drug use. I will never ask Portland residents to tolerate encampments and public drug use. We must enforce our laws and keep public spaces clean of needles, trash, and violence. The 3rd challenge is housing affordability. I will do everything in my power to promote prudent zoning changes and policy decisions that encourage more housing production. Moreover, I will work to eliminate costly rules that prevent more people from adding ADUs to their property.

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

Question 3: How have you been involved in the civic life of the community, and how do those experiences relate to becoming a member of the City Council?

Jess Falero: I have been working on the front lines of the housing and addiction crisis in our city for almost a decade. Organizing communities for change. Providing direct service and mutual aid to those in need. And advocating for solutions to our housing crisis, the number one issue creating the instability that permeates our city.

Ben Grant: I have served on the School Board since June of 2022, and prior to that I served in various capacities for the Ocean Avenue Elementary PTO, for Portland Area Youth Soccer Association, and on a special Committee for the School Board. Also, my wife works in the healthcare sector for Greater Portland Health, and I have two teenagers in the public schools. Through these experiences, and just living and raising a family here for the last 24 years, I have gained a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities here in Portland. Beyond that, I have had a long and varied career in politics in Maine - everything from serving on staff in the Legislature, to chairing the Maine Democratic Party, to co-chairing Gov. Mills' transition team. Through all these experiences, I have learned how to work with all kinds of people, and how to do so in the public eye.

Grayson Lookner: I've served in the state legislature for four years. I've worked on statewide and national campaigns such as the Ranked Choice Voting Campaign and for Bernie Sanders nationally. Prior to that, I worked with youth experiencing homelessness and with people struggling with Substance. I also worked as an EMT. During my time in the state ouse, I've learned how the rest of the state is often content to allow Portland to shoulder more than its fair share of the burden in statewide crises. I've also learned that on the housing front specifically, the city has many tools at its disposal that it's not pursuing actively.

Brandon Mazer: Over the last 15 years, I have been heavily involved in our community, serving on a variety of volunteer boards, including the Zoning Board of Appeals, the Planning Board, Maine State Music Theater, Friends of the Eastern Prom, and Special Olympics Maine. Each one of these experiences has allowed me to get new perspectives on how to continue to keep Portland the special city we all love. For example, my time with the Friends of Eastern Prom allowed me to appreciate how important our parks and open spaces are; while serving on Maine State Music Theater has shown me how important the arts are to a community (especially during Covid); and Special Olympics Maine has shown me how much inclusion and acceptance can make a difference in people's lives. Finally, serving on the Planning Board for the last seven years has given me incredible insight into what is and is not working in addressing our housing crisis.

Jake Viola: I serve as a Board Member on the Back Cove Neighborhood Association. Our association works on quality-of-life issues in the neighborhood, which is a microcosm of the City. In this service position, I focus on understanding the views and needs of my neighbors. This experience prepares me well for the City Council where listening to the views and needs of City residents will be my top priority.

Question 4: Now that the city's Homeless Services Center (HSC) has expanded and has beds available, do you approve of allowing people to sleep on public property and in parks? How should the city handle this issue?

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

Jess Falero: I was adamantly opposed to the sweeps because there was no alternative for these families and “sweeping” them was deeply disruptive to their safety and long-term health. But we lost that fight. I understand that. That said, having people camp in parks was never the long-term answer. That is why as a member of the Council, I will fight like hell for alternatives. More housing. More social workers. More rehab beds. Fighting for the services that the council promised to provide but unhoused people have not seen. I want to bridge the gap between unhoused people and community members. All the methods we know work in other communities that we simply need to implement here. If we get that done, camping in public parks will never again be an issue.

Ben Grant: I am not in favor of permanent encampments but we need to continue to invest in public health services, and in building Housing First projects to get ahead of the needs. I think everyone would agree that ending homelessness is the ultimate goal, but realistically there are a lot of things that need to be done to simply manage the issues down to much smaller numbers.

Grayson Lookner: Housing is the solution to homelessness, and the space at the shelter is inadequate, we need more housing; and in the meantime, we need more shelter space. When housing costs increase out of reach for middle-income earners in a city, that’s when homelessness rises proportionately. Affordable housing is the solution. We also need a scattered site model of shelters, with smaller settings scattered throughout the city. Additionally, we must make sure that other towns are doing their fair share to help their neighbors experiencing homelessness. That's why I introduced legislation to prevent other towns from banning emergency homeless shelters.

Brandon Mazer: No, I do not approve of allowing people to sleep on public property and in parks. Further, I do NOT support changing the policy to allow sleeping in our public property and parks. I believe we should maintain and follow the existing policy the City has been enforcing.

Jake Viola: No. We should not allow people to sleep on public property and in parks. Portland should enforce the law.

Question 5: The Bayside neighborhood continues to be the center of many public safety issues and crime. What action(s) would you recommend to help support and protect the residents of Bayside?

Jess Falero: The best way to help Bayside, like all neighborhoods in Portland, is to treat the causes of crime—poverty, addiction, untreated mental health conditions, etc. As a councilor, as I have outlined earlier, I will focus on the economic divide in our city, the affordable housing crisis, and the dire lack of treatment needed for our most vulnerable.

Ben Grant: The City should work in better partnership with community organizations to provide services but also to abide by the laws and regulations. Policing can play an important part, but we first should be addressing many of the issues as a health care crisis.

Grayson Lookner: Homelessness is what is driving most of these issues. Housing is a fundamental part of public and personal safety. Getting people housed is critical, then we will see a drop in crimes of petty theft and public misconduct associated with people experiencing several mental illnesses, disability, and homelessness.

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

Brandon Mazer: Bayside has taken and continues to take the brunt of the issues related to the negative effects of homelessness. While I am sympathetic to those suffering from homelessness, mental health issues, and substance abuse, there needs to be more responsibility and accountability from the service providers in taking care of their clients and their behavior as well as ensuring the area immediately surrounding their buildings are safe and secure. The City needs to create licenses for service providers which requires an application and review by the City and holds them accountable for their clients outside of their facilities.

Jake Viola: Empower the police to enforce the law. We cannot tolerate crime. It is not fair to our residents. There should be no neighborhood in this city where residents are unsafe.

Question 6: The needle exchange program has created an atmosphere where open drug use has resulted in thousands of discarded needles on city sidewalks and in parks. What would you recommend to improve this public safety issue?

Jess Falero: Honestly, I find the premise of this question very unfortunate. The needle exchange program does not create an atmosphere of open drug use nor does it contribute to the issue of discarded needles. In fact, this program has saved thousands of lives in Portland and is a one-for-one exchange. It also does not contribute to an atmosphere of open drug use. I fully support this program. I also support safe injection sites, which will both save lives and keep needles off the streets.

Ben Grant: I understand that the Council will revisit this issue in the near future and will be given data regarding usage and outcomes. If the policy isn't working, it should be reformed. Needle exchange was proposed on the belief that it would curtail negative health outcomes so let's see what's happened and weigh that against data regarding discards, etc.

Grayson Lookner: There are plenty of people who use drugs, who have the resources to stay housed, and typically those aren't the people who draw so much ire from neighborhoods, this points to the solution – housing.

Brandon Mazer: First and foremost, if we are going to allow a needle exchange program to exist, then the "exchange" aspect must occur. This is clearly not happening. If used needles were actually being exchanged for clean ones, we would not have the many discarded needles across our sidewalks and parks. This is a serious public safety and health issue and needs to be brought under control by actually requiring a 1:1 exchange and an evaluation of the City's Syringe Service Program.

Jake Viola: I would end the needle exchange program. We tried it. It failed. It is not a mistake to try creative ideas, but it is indefensible not to recognize when it's time to move on. At the very least, the program needs to strictly enforce a 1:1 exchange ratio so that the City isn't handing out hundreds of thousands more needles than it takes in. I recently walked home from downtown and lost count of the needles. I thought about my one-year-old daughter – our children deserve better from our city. We all deserve better.

Question 7: What initiatives, if any, would you support to help residents with substance use issues?

Jess Falero: I will focus on more housing, more social workers, more rehab beds, and safe injection sites. We also need smaller targeted shelters that focus specifically on substance use disorders.

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

Ben Grant: More beds and treatments. There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution, since addiction has many forms and many causes. Beyond that, many of the same answers apply – we need adequate and affordable housing, and good jobs for people to obtain. Direction, stability, and community are all bedrock needs.

Grayson Lookner: Treatment programs need to be made widely available to anyone who wants to get help. Often, these programs in Maine are unaffordable or inaccessible to the people who need them the most. Thankfully the state has taken some important steps providing more. It remains to be seen if it will be sufficient.

Brandon Mazer: The allocation of opioid settlement funds provide an opportunity to provide grants to programs that can help address substance abuse. Portland has received \$1,234,243 in settlement funds to be paid out over 18 years, approximately \$235,000 annually. With these funds we can help subsidize the availability of local addiction treatment facilities as well as fostering partnerships with local non-profits to provide additional support services. I am a strong believer in creating public-private partnerships to help expand these resources. Further, “sober houses” should be registered with the City and inspected for the safety of their clients.

Jake Viola: More important than any city initiative, residents with substance use issues must want to help themselves first. I'd work to build on the success of the Homeless Services Center (HSC) in reducing overdose deaths. I'd also promote data sharing among city departments to better understand a person's touchpoints with the city so that we can more efficiently administer programs, reach those in need, and permanently transition residents to stable housing with the help of social workers.

Question 8: What is your plan to address the longstanding shortage of affordable housing construction and create homes for residents, in addition to subsidized housing for low-income residents and formerly unhoused residents?

Jess Falero: Our city, by conservative estimates, is 5,000 to 10,000 units short of what we need. That is why I support a \$50M housing bond to be used to build affordable housing throughout the city. The money would be used to create affordable social housing, which ultimately pays for itself, mixed use developments, family size housing for all the new families we need to attract, and student housing to ease the crunch our vital post-secondary schools create on the general housing market.

Ben Grant: Recode provides some good changes, but we also need to be bold in our thinking about new housing starts. I'm in favor of taking some big swings - for instance, the redevelopment of Franklin Arterial and a resolution to the MidTown fiasco could free up appropriate space for hundreds of new units. As I inferred (in other responses), we need to have a mix of all kinds of housing - so that the economics of supply and demand can begin to work in our favor.

Grayson Lookner: Social housing, in the style of Montgomery County, Maryland, is an approach that Portland should pursue. This will be one more tool in the toolbox in addressing the housing crisis. I've given multiple presentations about this approach, and you can watch one of them with lawmakers from across the country at this link,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEuN8giU3rA>

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

Brandon Mazer: My experience on the Planning Board has given me great insight as to the regulatory hurdles to affordable housing, what is working and what is not. While there are a number of external factors outside the control of the City, there are many policies standing in the way of additional housing which need to be changed. 1) We need to better utilize the Jill Dusen Housing Trust Fund to assist affordable housing developers to get more units built. These funds should NOT be used for market rate developments. 2) We need to make the permitting process less cumbersome and address the significant design cost for smaller developers and homeowners. Revisions to current policies need to be changed due to interpretation of various codes causing very few ADU's to be built. 3) The loophole that recently allowed conversion of housing to a hotel has to be closed.

Jake Viola: It's too hard to build in Portland. We are losing out to surrounding communities. It should not be this way. It's time to reconsider the burdensome zoning requirements passed in 2020 that have slowed housing production. Of the 1,281 units approved in 2023, only 26 had been built as of last month. We must improve our processes and we must improve our policies. I'll push for a streamlined process at City Hall that makes it easier to navigate siloed government bureaucracy. Moreover, I will do everything in my power on the Council to promote prudent zoning changes and policy decisions that encourage more housing production.

Question 9: What is your opinion of ReCode and its potential impact on the city?

Jess Falero: The recode is a vital process in re-writing our zoning rules to ensure the code adequately addresses Portland's needs around housing, transportation, our working waterfront, energy use, and climate change. As councilor, I look forward to reviewing the final recommendations and ensuring the final product sets our city on a path toward equity, prosperity, and affordability.

Ben Grant: Generally, I am supportive. Portland needs to grow, and I think ReCode is an important tool. I firmly believe we can house a lot more people, affordably, and still maintain the community and neighborhood character we all enjoy about Portland. There may even be areas that ReCode doesn't go far enough, so as a Councilor I would be constantly looking at ways to improve the outcomes.

Grayson Lookner: We need more housing density, and exclusionary zoning is largely how we ended up in the crisis that we're in. In order for us to preserve our working communities and culture, we need the housing. I also feel that preserving historic landmarks is important, and these two needs can be balanced. We can preserve our historic sites and unique culture AND build the type of housing we need so people can afford to live here.

Brandon Mazer: My hope, if done correctly, is the overall impact of ReCode will be one of balance, with moderate increased density to address housing needs while also respecting the unique fabric of our individual neighborhoods. It is also important to note that the state legislative bill LD2003 had a major impact on ReCode by requiring communities to create certain allowances for affordable housing and accessory units as permitted uses in residential zones. The Planning Board recommended modest changes to comply with the law, but the City Council took action beyond those recommendations, approving amendments brought forward by a special interest group that

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

were not supported by the Planning Board. The amendments specifically included removing the protection for demolition of existing buildings to be replaced with a multi-unit.

Jake Viola: I support ReCode. I am excited to see the positive impact it has on our housing crisis in creating more units for the city. We must constantly evaluate ReCode and amplify the parts that are working and amend those that aren't.

Question 10: With regard to the city budget, in what areas would you recommend significant changes – increases, decreases, process, etc.?

Jess Falero: We need to always adequately fund our schools. The property tax relief program for low-income seniors and renters needs to be expanded to all age groups. We should cut back on corporate welfare like TIF's and infrastructure investments that support developers, but do little for the public good.

Ben Grant: The most significant change would be to work in a coalition with towns and cities around Maine to convince the Legislature to give localities more tools to generate revenue. We have ever-increasing needs, but we cannot keep relying so heavily on the local property tax - especially in the City that is the economic engine for the State. That will require a focused strategy on changing state policy. Regarding the budget itself, I will always favor making sure our front-line workers have top-notch compensation and benefits.

Grayson Lookner: The city needs new sources of revenue, and I've proposed several. From creating a social housing developer to enacting fees on megayachts and cruise ships to pay for sea level rise infrastructure, there are many opportunities to increase services without raising taxes.

Brandon Mazer: City budgeting must be based on priorities to meet the identified needs of the City with special attention to the impact on taxpayers and increased debt service. Some of my top priorities would include funding infrastructure Capital Improvement projects with funds from retired bonds without incurring new debt, seeking alternative revenue sources, including a local option tax, supporting state legislative changes to reimbursement rates to child care providers for clients with vouchers for the working poor, exploring ways to contain the growing Health & Human Services budget, and evaluating the cost of purple trash bags in relation to its intended purpose of funding the curbside recycling program.

Jake Viola: We need to prioritize expenditures and understand that Portland residents are not ATMs. (We need) to lessen the tax burden and improve quality of life: 1) *Fill job vacancies:* Portland spends too much money on overtime and is failing to deliver basic services. One out of every five jobs is vacant. We have fewer people to do the jobs we need done but are paying more for them to do it because of overtime costs. We deserve to have regular trash pickup, potholes filled, streets plowed, street lights replaced, our city safe and clean. 2) *Fight for more General Assistance funding:* Portland residents take pride in helping others. We have disproportionately stepped up compared to surrounding communities to welcome New Mainers as part of the nationwide migrant crisis. But our residents have been stuck with too high a bill. I will pressure the state to reimburse us at a higher rate.

Question 11: How should the city respond to the sea level rise and combat climate change?

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

Jess Falero: We need to pass a significant climate change bond to protect our working waterfront, convert public buildings to renewable energy, and build electric infrastructure so cruise ships can power off their fossil fuel driven engines when they are in port. We should also ban gas hook-ups on all future developments, heavily build out our public transit and bike/walk infrastructure, and require all current buildings to reduce their carbon footprint to zero within ten years.

Ben Grant: We should make public transportation more robust and dependable, and we should make sure City and School facilities are maximizing efficiency. The whole coast of Maine is going to be fighting sea level rise, so we should be working with the State and coastal areas on best practices to mitigate damage. Finally, we need to clean up our own backyard - for instance working with the State and business interests to remove the coal pile from the West End/Fore River waterfront.

Grayson Lookner: Those responsible for the crisis should be responsible for mitigating it. That's why I believe climate impact fees on cruise ships, megayachts, and other disproportionate emitters of greenhouse gasses are appropriate to pay for sea level rise mitigation infrastructure and electrifying our waterfront.

Brandon Mazer: Portland's future depends on a healthy environment which benefits nature, people and our way of life now and for future generations. I support the goals of the city. One Climate Change Future plan. We also need to expand the Tree Canopy Program and plant more trees! Nothing bothers me more than to see tree wells that are filled in with tar or cement rather than planting a new tree. ReCode is also addressing sea level rise by including a Coastal Flood Resilience Overlay Zone which attempts to protect people and structures from sea level rise and storm surge.

Jake Viola: Climate change is a collective-action problem. Leading on the issue does not mean going it alone. I would seek out all opportunities to partner with federal, state, and municipal governments on practical policy ideas. I'd fight to minimize what Portland alone spends and maximize benefits to our economy. Portland can and should ensure more resilient infrastructure. We cannot afford to let Commercial Street flood in every storm or to lose our working waterfront. My family has been commercial fishing out of Portland for nearly 100 years. For me, protecting our working waterfront is personal.

Question 12: In 2026, the city budget will have \$22.3 million open annually upon retirement of the pension obligation bonds. What is your top priority for that money?

Jess Falero: We need to use that available debt service to pass significant bonds for housing, climate change initiatives, and long delayed public works projects.

Ben Grant: I don't have a specific proposal for a line item like this - other than to double down on the City's top priorities: housing, education, and affordability. That could mean direct support - like the Housing Trust - or ensuring City departments are appropriately staffed to assess and move projects at a faster pace. It could mean investing in the infrastructure around a new high school, if we are approved for State construction funding. These are just a couple examples...\$22m is a significant amount, so I am sure we can make a dent in several key areas.

Grayson Lookner: It should go towards a social housing developer, which will create revenue for the city.

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

Brandon Mazer: The highest priority should first be taxpayer relief by controlling increases in taxes. As I have talked to voters across the City many are fearful that they may no longer be able to stay in their homes due to the increasing property tax burden. We should also identify one-time projects that do not increase our bonded indebtedness, such as improve traffic and pedestrian safety, improve streets and sidewalks, and improve our parks and playgrounds.

Jake Viola: I support tax relief for our residents. We've asked residents to shoulder a lot of costs in the past few years. This is their money and they deserve it back in their pockets.

CITY COUNCIL - DISTRICT 1

Question 1: Why are you running for City Council and what specific skills do you think you would bring to the position?

Sarah Michniewicz: I'm running because Portland is facing significant challenges and opportunities, and I have the real-world experience, community leadership background, and balanced perspective needed to represent District One as we navigate these complex issues. For over 27 years I've lived and worked in Bayside, the neighborhood where Portland's biggest issues are playing out - the housing crisis, homelessness and encampments, mental health and substance use, public health and safety, and climate change and sea level rise. I've been both a renter and a homeowner, an employee and a small business owner, and a tireless volunteer. As a community leader and advocate I've built relationships with a wide range of stakeholders, worked hard to understand the policies and city processes that affect our neighborhoods, and spoken up for positive change. My community involvement, focus on practical solutions, and ability to work constructively with others makes me uniquely qualified to serve on the Council.

Todd Morse: I am running for City Council because I want to help build a city that is safe, walkable, and has enough housing for everyone. Portland is a great city where people truly care. We have been facing challenges but I believe we can overcome them and I want to do my part in that. I am president of the Urbanist Coalition of Portland, which advocates for a safer, more vibrant city; and I serve on two city boards and would like to further my engagement. Professionally, I have been an EMT, and a software engineer. I have built infectious disease research software for a nonprofit, and I co-founded a business that tests treatments for FDA approval. These experiences have developed my data and systems analysis skills and given me insight into some of the day-to-day processes at City Hall. They have also given me the opportunity to work collaboratively with people who have different viewpoints.

Question 2: What are the top 3 challenges facing the city and how would you address them?

Sarah Michniewicz: Housing, homelessness, and affordability. With each issue, there are multiple potential solutions. With housing, we can leverage ReCode changes to increase housing density in optimal locations. We need to identify policies that may be inadvertently slowing development of new housing and invest in transportation to support increased housing density along transit corridors and off-peninsula, as well as explore incentives for the types of housing we want. With homelessness, we need to evaluate Portland's homeless services system to create a "map" of programs and providers, identifying gaps and overlaps in services, create a day space, and pass a shelter licensing ordinance to ensure client safety and operator accountability. And with

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

affordability, we need to evaluate the social service budget to seek potential efficiencies, support aging in place programs, and review city fees, among other measures.

Todd Morse: The top challenge Portland faces is a lack of housing and especially a lack of permanently affordable housing. To address this problem, I want to reform our land use and building codes to allow for the denser neighborhoods that are common in District 1 to be more easily built across Portland. We also need to be investing more in housing options outside of traditional for-profit development. Our next largest challenge is homelessness. These are related but people who are unhoused often need more support than affordable housing alone. The long term solution is more supportive housing projects, but these take time. It is critical that we first ensure that our shelter system is being fully utilized so that no one has to sleep outside. The third largest problem is climate change. We need to be investing in infrastructure that will protect us from sea level rise and the effects of climate change.

Question 3: How have you been involved in the civic life of the community, and how do those experiences relate to becoming a member of the City Council?

Sarah Michniewicz: I've been involved in my community on every level for over a decade, collaborating with city leaders, staff and other stakeholders to create short-term solutions and long-term policies to address our city's shared problems. I've seen how issues like homelessness have evolved, and that helps me think critically about the path forward. Since 2017, I've been president of the Bayside Neighborhood Association, where I have advocated for solutions to community issues including housing, homelessness, climate change, trees and green space, fixing streets and sidewalks.. I'm also vice president and longtime volunteer at the HART of Maine cat shelter, where I have organized adoptions, developed policies and operated essential programs and fundraising events. I serve on Preble Street's Elena's Way Wellness Shelter Advisory Board, co-coordinate the Bayside Community Garden, and have participated in numerous other projects and groups.

Todd Morse: I am a member of the CDBG Allocation Committee and the Zoning Board of Appeals, both of which are appointed by the City Council. I am also a member of the Portland Bike and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (PBPAC), and the president of the Urbanist Coalition of Portland (UCP), which has worked on a variety of issues to help alleviate the housing crisis and create a more livable city. My experience on these City boards has deepened my familiarity with the technical aspects of Portland's government, which has prepared me well for the day-to-day responsibilities of City Council. My experience as a member and leader of advocacy groups, like UCP and PBPAC, has shown me how to listen, build bridges, and find common ground—an important part of being a councilor.

Question 4: Now that the city's Homeless Services Center (HSC) has expanded and has beds available, do you approve of allowing people to sleep on public property and in parks? How should the city handle this issue?

Sarah Michniewicz: We need to get people inside before an encampment can grow into a place where those looking to harm others find easy prey, violence occurs, and the surrounding area becomes unsafe for the community. The city's encampment policy provides a clear framework to bring people indoors, whether through the HSC, another shelter, or into housing. Since January, the HSC has lowered some barriers, people are moving into housing, and overdose deaths are less than

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

half what they were last year. Care and adequate offers of service must be given when addressing campers that remain in public spaces. It's not a perfect system, and as councilor one of my priorities will be to improve it.

Todd Morse: No one should have to sleep outside. It is inhumane and unsafe. I do not support allowing this. However, the more important question is not whether we should have people sleeping outside, but how we address it. We need to build a process to ensure trust and coordination between the City and service providers. We need to treat people with care and send them somewhere safe where they can stay long term and seek services to get them back on their feet. What we don't want to do is get into a game of whack-a-mole. No one benefits from simply moving people around.

Question 5: The Bayside neighborhood continues to be the center of many public safety issues and crime. What action(s) would you recommend to help support and protect the residents of Bayside?

Sarah Michniewicz: I live in the middle of Bayside's social services and believe both the community and social service clients deserve the quality of life, services, and amenities other neighborhoods enjoy. Short-term, two things have to happen - improvement of the current situation, and changing policies that have concentrated struggling people in this area. We need to enforce ordinances, engage community groups and agencies delivering food and services to participate in cleaning up meal deliveries and syringe waste, and provide adequate policing, especially around shelters, schools, homes, and the day care. Long-term we need to conduct a review of Portland's social services landscape to ensure that we are effectively and efficiently delivering services, increase housing options, and address root causes.

Todd Morse: The Bayside neighborhood is an example of our nation's dark history of urban renewal. It was redlined as "hazardous" and has been seen as a dumping ground. Homes were demolished and highways were built through it. Rebuilding this neighborhood will take time but it is critical not just for Bayside but for all of Portland. Bayside needs mixed-income housing instead of vacant lots. This will create more pedestrian activity, put more eyes on the street, build up a tax base for reinvestment into the neighborhood, and create a vibrant community that can address some of these challenges. We also need to invest more in community policing, street lights, the community garden, and cleanup efforts.

Question 6: The needle exchange program has created an atmosphere where open drug use has resulted in thousands of discarded needles on city sidewalks and in parks. What would you recommend to improve this public safety issue?

Sarah Michniewicz: Improperly discarded syringes in public spaces have exploded in recent years. It's an environmental problem, a public health issue, and an equity problem since many of the syringes end up in low-income areas. Agencies distributing syringes and paraphernalia should collaborate in retrieval efforts, and a buyback program should be explored. An analysis of the pros and cons of reducing the distribution ratio should be conducted to arrive at a data-based number right for Portland. If more engagement with providers saves lives, we should do all we can to bring people back to exchange syringes more frequently.

Todd Morse: While exchange programs have been proven to greatly reduce the spread of disease, discarded needles are a public health hazard that needs to be addressed. We need to invest more in

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

proactively cleaning these needles up and responding to See Click Fix requests when the public identifies them. We should also focus on limiting how many needles get discarded in the first place by exploring updating our needle exchange policies to provide more incentives to return them. Long-term, we need more drug treatment to get people out of cycles of addiction.

Question 7: What initiatives, if any, would you support to help residents with substance use issues?

Sarah Michniewicz: Portland's substance use treatment programs should be inventoried. But it's important to remember that SUD is everywhere - housed people in stable situations, teens, and immigrant communities also suffer and need outreach and access to help. I support more accessible treatment beds, strategically deploying opioid settlement funds toward prevention and treatment, tightly coordinating social service agencies to receive people exiting jail who may be ready to accept treatment, treatment and support resources specific to marginalized communities and social groups, access to Medication Assisted Treatment and peer support in jails in order to capitalize on the opportunity to break the cycle of addiction (not under council purview, but I support it).

Todd Morse: I am in support of expanding substance abuse treatment programs throughout the city. On the Zoning Board of Appeals I was able to review and ultimately approve applications for new small-scale group recovery homes. We should continue to allow for and support facilities like this. I support long term investment in supportive housing projects that put people on a stable footing so they can focus on their recovery and remove themselves from harmful patterns that keep them trapped. Substance use is a national problem and Portland can't solve it alone. There are other sources of funding and national programs that we should make sure we are leveraging.

Question 8: What is your plan to address the longstanding shortage of affordable housing construction and create homes for residents, in addition to subsidized housing for low-income residents and formerly unhoused residents?

Sarah Michniewicz: We need to evaluate the impact of the 25% inclusionary zoning ordinance. While units explicitly labeled "affordable" hold enormous appeal, it appears not to have driven affordable housing production as intended. We also need to do what works, for example, streamlining the permitting process, incentivizing rehabilitation of existing buildings suitable for housing, exploring city owned properties as sites for housing development, site supportive and housing first-type models in areas conducive to tenants *remaining* housed.

Todd Morse: The first step to addressing the housing shortage is updating our zoning and building codes to maintain and enhance neighborhood character that allows for the walkable, human-scale neighborhoods people love to be built throughout Portland. We also need non-market housing that is accessible for residents of all income levels. And we can also explore supporting the construction of that housing by leveraging our bonding authority to get that housing built sooner and cheaper than a traditional developer could.

Question 9: What is your opinion of ReCode and its potential impact on the city?

Sarah Michniewicz: ReCode has potential to positively impact the city by increasing housing production and choice and promoting sustainable development. I generally support the proposed changes to modernize our city's development regulations and promote smart growth strategies but

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

have questions about whether it will disincentivize building multi-bedroom units and green space in new developments, particularly in low-income areas. While it may not be perfect, continuing to delay ReCode's passage and implementation is likely to delay the building of the housing we need right now. ReCode is a massive change and while much is simplified, land use is always complex. There are groups that don't feel the current proposal goes far enough, but I would advocate that we pass the work completed, continue to gather evidence about what is and isn't working for Portland, and make changes as needed.

Todd Morse: ReCode is an effort to make our land use code align with our Comprehensive Plan. The changes within ReCode will have a very modest effect on the character of Portland but are important steps in the right direction towards a walkable city with more housing. However, there are some areas where ReCode could be more ambitious towards meeting the goals for housing, transit, and walkable neighborhoods laid out in the Comprehensive Plan. While the ReCode draft is not finalized, I think it is important that we move this initiative across the finish line with an eye towards meeting these goals.

Question 10: With regard to the city budget, in what areas would you recommend significant changes – increases, decreases, process, etc.?

Sarah Michniewicz: Regarding process, Portland's council has never taken active responsibility for setting an overall tax rate. We need to publish guidance on a combined mill-rate target earlier, so the school finance committee understands the city's tax goals and has a chance to collaborate effectively to reach them. Preferably tax increases will never be far above inflation so we can keep Portland affordable to all types of residents, but it's worth considering whether an upper taxation limit should be determined by ordinance. The ongoing increases in social service spending deserve a closer look. The fire and police departments spend significant resources responding to overdoses and mental health events, which may be making it harder to understand the true cost of our social service programs. If the council were to experiment with a round of zero-based budgeting, the social service department could be a place to start.

Todd Morse: The City's budget is the key policy document for Portland. I believe in having high quality public services but we also need to be efficient and realistic because every increase in the City's budget can put people who are struggling to remain in their homes in real hardship. We need to evaluate programs for their effectiveness and to have an earnest assessment of our staffing needs to ensure they are accomplishing our goals, we should never spend one-time funds on ongoing expenses, and we should take a longer-range view when it comes to capital expenses. We also need to invest in growing our tax revenue streams, for example: allowing for more housing in more of the city, developing Franklin Street, and opening the Temple Street Garage 7 days a week.

Question 11: How should the city respond to the sea level rise and combat climate change?

Sarah Michniewicz: Assertively! Regarding sea level rise, this is an issue that will have a particular impact on District 1 in Bayside and the working waterfront. Solutions in different parts of the peninsula vary. In Bayside, living shoreline sea-level rise mitigation should be studied, and the Bayside Adapts report should be reviewed. On the waterfront, infrastructure responses will play a big role. In all cases, new developments planned in future flood zones must be built to higher resiliency standards. More broadly the city should follow the recommendations laid out in the One Climate Future Action Plan - electrify, decarbonize, reduce building emissions, improve the

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

transportation network to enable denser housing along major transportation corridors and build complete neighborhood centers. Special focus should be placed on preserving and expanding the tree canopy, gardens and green spaces in the least green, least equitable neighborhoods, which are most vulnerable to increasing temperatures.

Todd Morse: Unfortunately, the effects of climate change are already here and District 1 is feeling the effects most acutely. Storms are getting worse and worse and Bayside is regularly inundated with water. The islands have also suffered extensive damage to their shorelines. There is a project underway in Back Cove to build new tanks to retain storm water but it has been ongoing for years and is still not complete. Building solutions to this problem is hard and takes time. We need to start thinking about building our expertise and planning future projects now so we can protect our city instead of fixing the damage after the fact. We should seriously consider projects like building a barrier under Tukey's bridge. These types of projects are not something Portland can do alone so we need to build our capacity and advocate for these projects but ultimately be collaborative with the Portland Water District, State and Federal governments.

Question 12: In 2026, the city budget will have \$22.3 million open annually upon retirement of the pension obligation bonds. What is your top priority for that money?

Sarah Michniewicz: When the time comes, we may have a new set of objectives, priorities, and problems. Areas of investment now, like social services, housing development and climate change mitigation, may shift. I would be most strongly in favor of developing a working group to consider this topic, so that it is based on sound research and decision-making, and critical thinking, not special interest-group suggestions, idealism, or campaign promises. Generally I believe that creating a rainy-day fund is preferable to immediate spend-down in such rare cases when surpluses appear. Portland has become somewhat mired in reaction, and I would like to help move us into a more strategic mindset.

Todd Morse: Having access to this money is a unique opportunity for Portland. I would first like to say that this money belongs to the city and I support an open process for deciding what to do with it. My personal priorities would be: investing more in deeply needed quality of life improvements like making sure our streets and sidewalks are paved and clear; investing in transit, pedestrian, and cycling improvements; saving for long term capital projects; supporting affordable housing projects; funding substance use treatment; climate resilience, e.g., hiring an engineer to investigate resilience projects.

CITY COUNCIL - DISTRICT 2

Question 1: Why are you running for City Council and what specific skills do you think you would bring to the position?

Atiim Boykin: Public infrastructure upgrades, fostering community connections, enhancing public safety, and environmental justice. I want to be the representation that forms a solid platform from the voices of the people I will be representing. There are very few councilors who will take the time to make time and listen to their constituents, and I want to be one of them. I want to inform my leadership, as I have in every leadership role I've held, by listening to the people I am charged with representing. Because I believe there is a lack of constituent centered representation, I want to bring

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

my over two decades of experience in social services and education to the role as District 2 Advocate as a City Councilor.

Nancy English: For 11 years as a paralegal for the City Attorney's Office, I worked on hundreds of agendas, drafting orders and resolves for council meetings. This advanced familiarity with the nitty gritty of City Council work allows me to understand how it makes changes. Any issues I would support, should I be elected, would need to be well-researched and well-argued, either by me, by staff, or by other councilors. I also have a good understanding of the consequences of council decisions from the perspective of how the city government functions.

Catherine Nekoie: I am running for City Council because I am eager to give back to the Portland community that has given me so much, and I believe it is my turn to step up and serve.

Robert O'Brien: The city did a commendable job responding to the refugee crises, the tent city crises, and COVID, but when it comes to less visible crises such as housing, climate impact, and the cost of living, the City's responses aren't adequate to deter the deluge of dueling referenda we get at each election cycle. Councilors cannot wait until staff bring them solutions to these tough issues; councilors need to be proactive and persistent about policy development. I have 15 years collective experience serving on public boards, a master's degree in public policy, and have been employed for almost nine years in economic development, public policy, and housing specialties. I can help our city meet our challenges with solutions.

Wes Pelletier: I've spent years writing policy, building coalitions, and organizing people to work towards a shared goal, and will use these skills to provide the working class of our city with a strong voice in city hall that's willing to fight to prevent the further loss of our workforce.

Question 2: What are the top 3 challenges facing the city and how would you address them?

Atiim Boykin: Public infrastructure upgrades, viable housing options that keep Mainers and specifically Portlanders in Portland, Maine, and environmental justice.

Nancy English: The city faces a housing crisis and a homeless crisis that will require enormous effort from itself and many others to address. We need to build more housing of all kinds; we need to remove the disincentives to building; and we need to address the Inclusionary zoning requirements now holding things up. We must start to raise expectations for our streets and parks by finding better answers to problems created by substance abuse. The third top challenge is balancing a budget without imposing large tax increases, and balance is the key, keeping taxpayers firmly in mind.

Catherine Nekoie: Housing, homelessness, and safety of our city and public spaces

Robert O'Brien: The three top issues are housing, climate impact, and budgeting for underfunded and competing interests. For my response to housing, see question 8; for climate impact, see question 11; for budgeting, see question 10. *(Editor's Note: These will be included in the publication of future candidate responses.)*

Wes Pelletier: Housing is, without a doubt, the biggest issue facing our city and my district, and feeds into a lot of the livability issues, including the lack of reliable and easy-to-use public transit.

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

Another issue that creates a lot of smaller issues is the difficulty many residents face when trying to interface with city hall, and I'd love to both serve as ally and liaison for residents in dealing with the city, and fight for improvements to digital infrastructure and staffing that will streamline the process for all.

Question 3: How have you been involved in the civic life of the community, and how do those experiences relate to becoming a member of the City Council?

Atiim Boykin: I have been deeply involved in the arts and cultural community in Maine since 2018 and have been involved in the criminal justice and social service community here since 2022. This is an extension of the work and passion I've brought with me from California with over 20 years experience in both fields. I have worked for Portland Ovations as their Community Engagement Director, serve on the Advisory Circle of Indigo Arts Alliance, and I'm a board member of Cultural Alliance of Maine. I work as a Forensic Intensive Case Manager for the Office of Behavioral Health and I support returning citizens as they transition from prison and jail, or community supervision, as well as participate on homeless task forces in York County and Long Term Stayers and the Languishing Committee here in Portland serving Cumberland County.

Nancy English: I am a public member of the Fee Arbitration Commission, which hears complaints about lawyers' fees. Risking lawsuits in response to council actions is something I will avoid. I was a worker on the 2010 Census, and I have been in many homes in District 2, rich and poor: I know who we are. I have worked as an election clerk and witnessed how carefully the Portland City Clerk manages our elections. In the past I was a regular church goer and choir member. Creating harmony takes a lot of practice!

Catherine Nekoie: I may not have been formally involved in civic life, but I've been deeply engaged with our community in other impactful ways. I've raised three successful and contributing children, dedicated years to fundraising and supporting charities, managed a small business alongside my husband, and facilitated real estate transactions that support local growth. My hands-on experience and commitment to Portland demonstrate my readiness to contribute effectively as a city councilor.

Robert O'Brien: I served on the Portland School Board for District 2, chairing the policy committee, and sitting on the Finance Committee and the Facilities Committee. The school budget is half our tax bill. No other candidate has this level of school system knowledge. I was also elected to two different Charter Commissions in 2009 and 2021. No one knows the roles and duties of city officials better. Since 2016, the City Council has appointed me to three terms on the Historic Preservation Board — chairing it in 2023 and 2024 — approving in-fill development in Peninsula neighborhoods. Finally, I was president of the West End Neighborhood Association in 2006, organizing monthly forums and hosting a charrette for the Reiche Community Center.

Wes Pelletier: I've done a great deal of organizing and building coalitions among many groups in Portland, bridging gaps between activists, unions, non-profits, businesses, and every day working class folks who don't have the time to get plugged in. I've built up many relationships just by showing up to an event and finding a way that I can help things run smoothly or more easily, and I'd love to take that energy to City Hall.

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

Question 4: Now that the city's Homeless Services Center (HSC) has expanded and has beds available, do you approve of allowing people to sleep on public property and in parks? How should the city handle this issue?

Atiim Boykin: Though I don't believe tent cities are the answer to homelessness, I do believe there are ways to support our unsheltered neighbors while there are no available beds at the HSC, which involves more oversight, funding and support from the City of Portland. There are options that many of the frontline organizations working directly with this vulnerable population, as I do, can convene and discuss to help navigate this citywide, statewide, and nationwide housing crisis. We have to create a space to listen and create solutions from short term to long term.

Nancy English: I do not approve of allowing people to sleep on public property. The Homeless Services Center, with a capacity of 258 beds, has had available beds this summer. As of August 26, 2024, the City's Unhoused Community Dashboard had four tents listed on city property; 11 on State of Maine property, and 12 on private property, far fewer than in 2023. We should balance the needs of the people on the street living with substance use disorder and mental illness with the needs of the people in apartments and houses (including people recently unhoused or who also live with substance abuse disorder or mental illness) for order and safety and the opportunity to have a good life.

Catherine Nekoie: I would like to see the city implement ordinances to prohibit encampments on public property. This would help ensure that our public spaces remain safe, accessible, and welcoming for everyone in the community. Additionally, we should engage more with professionals to explore alternative strategies for persuading individuals who are reluctant to seek shelter. Expert insights could offer innovative approaches, allowing us to address this issue more effectively and provide better support for those in need.

Robert O'Brien: No. So long as there is vacancy at the HSC, the City should be diligent about deterring encampments before they establish. Homeless individuals should be treated with compassion, dignity, and reasonable patience, but that does not include allowing tent cities to accumulate. That also means when the HSC nears or exceeds capacity, the City must be swift in providing additional room. As for a compassionate and dignified response, I have witnessed police officers use a friendly and un-rushed tone in approaching an illegal tent encampment and agree upon with the tenants a reasonable schedule to relocate (in that case it was within 12 hours).

Wes Pelletier: My neighbor down the street, a 7-months pregnant woman, was recently evicted by her landlord so that her home could be converted into an AirBnB. She doesn't have enough money to get a new place, and doesn't want to stay in the shelter because it's too far from her job, and she's unable to sleep there because of the noise made by the many folks having mental illness episodes, so she's sleeping in a tent. I don't think she or others who have found themselves in her situation should have to go to jail or be run out of town, and the city should focus on first keeping people in their homes by enforcing existing tenant protections, second, we should revisit the small shelters proposal to create different spaces to go and, in the meantime, build regulated encampments that have access to services and are kept clean by residents and city staff.

Question 5: The Bayside neighborhood continues to be the center of many public safety issues and crime. What action(s) would you recommend to help support and protect the residents of Bayside?

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

Atiim Boykin: All people paying rent, mortgages, or experiencing life there unsheltered are residents of Bayside and of Portland. I believe the Portland Police Department have already begun to tackle some of the issues related to the crime, but I believe there needs to be a coalition of non-profit, city government and law enforcement voices consistently in conversation to address the issues of public health and safety. We need to weekly understand what is working and what is not and become more dynamic in both our responses, short-term, mid-term, and long term solutions. There are a great number of organizations already meeting weekly statewide, countywide, and city wide to discuss and address this issue, and they should be at the table to share their intel and ideas.

Nancy English: Bayside suffers most from the problems that orbit nonprofits working with the homeless like crime, and that must change. We must start supporting families who are trying to get on with their lives. To start, and at the least, we must make methadone and similar medications more readily available so that people who want that help to stop can get it. Better coordination between courts and the jail must be advocated for and followed up on. Shelter licensing that makes enforcement of public safety issues easier is also essential.

Catherine Nekoie: I would like to see increased police monitoring in the Bayside neighborhood, with a focus on improving response times. Additionally, starting a neighborhood watch program could foster collaboration between police and residents, helping to deter undesirable behaviors and enhance overall community safety.

Robert O'Brien: (1) Cadets on foot patrol (to report infractions in real time), (2) the resource van (for interventions in non-violent situations), and (3) community policing and case workers. All three of these approaches have been (and some are currently) practiced in Portland, but a constant and consistent presence with a resourced response will quell undesired behaviors. No one deserves to live in a neighborhood that feels unsafe.

Wes Pelletier: The first step I would take is to make sure that the city is proactively enforcing rent control and tenant protections, rather than making tenants discover and report infractions themselves (which often results in a non-renewal of their lease). Once that's done, the city can start to build more thought-out shelters and organized encampments that can provide people with alternative, cleaner places to stay and try and get their lives back together.

Question 6: The needle exchange program has created an atmosphere where open drug use has resulted in thousands of discarded needles on city sidewalks and in parks. What would you recommend to improve this public safety issue?

Atiim Boykin: I believe there should be a committee to investigate the efficacy of sanctioned zones for use, and that needles should be limited to areas of use where there are non-profit and city staff available to support them if they overdose. Needle exchanges do reduce the transmission of certain deadly diseases, and we have to think about how to contain a mess that can and will potentially harm our children and other citizens.

Nancy English: We need to return to an actual exchange, asking clients of this program to turn in used needles. But, unfortunately, it is hard to imagine this being a perfect solution. We must open discussion among the needle exchange workers and the needle recipients, residents, parks workers –

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

everyone affected -- emphasizing that public property must be free of used needles. And unless we can agree to solutions that keep needles out of our playgrounds and parks, the program must stop.

Catherine Nekoie: While we engage with the needle exchange program to discuss their policies, we should also launch an educational campaign to promote the City's 'SeeClickFix' app. Additionally, if feasible, the City could train groups of neighborhood volunteers to expedite the cleanup of needles in their areas, enhancing our community's safety and responsiveness.

Robert O'Brien: One of the concerns I have is that the needle exchange program is not a one-for-one exchange. If participants were required to present expended needles in order to receive an equal number of fresh ones, then suddenly used needles would have redemption value to pick up and turn in. I would like to see this modeled and implemented.

Wes Pelletier: The presence of needles in public spaces is the most visible symptom of the intersection of the housing and opioid crises, and cleaning them up is going to take some efforts at addressing the broader issues, which I've outlined in my other answers. While overdose prevention centers and regulated encampments are in the works, though, I'd love to use my organizing experience to create a neighborhood steward program in which neighbors keep an eye on our public spaces and keep them clean. Ideally, this could happen in conjunction with the Parks departments to further the shared sense of ownership.

Question 7: What initiatives, if any, would you support to help residents with substance use issues?

Attim Boykin: Whatever initiatives are backed by science, front line experience, and research.

Nancy English: I applaud the expansion of Milestone's detox program on Andover Street. Another local recovery program that accepts MaineCare is also open. Sober living facilities are desperately needed for persons newly sober, who need orderly places to continue working on recovery. Licensing low-barrier shelters to maintain safe and healthy environments would be an important step.

Catherine Nekoie: I support measures that assist residents with substance use issues. Although I may not have direct experience with this issue, I am committed to supporting efforts to gather information and develop solution-oriented approaches. I am eager to learn and collaborate on finding effective solutions.

Robert O'Brien: I think it's about providing wet shelters and housing first without barriers that are combined with a professional support network offering users a path to recovery. So long as there is capacity in those facilities, I think it requires breaking up places where drug abuse is rampant. I also think bolstered social workers in the high schools can help catch young people falling through the cracks. Other communities in the US and around the globe have trialed interventions. Let's listen to the experts; let's listen to those who have tried these methods before us; let's listen to those who have lived it and recovered.

Wes Pelletier: By working to create Overdose Prevention Sites, especially through leveraging funds made available by the settlement money from the pharmaceutical corporations responsible for creating the opioid epidemic, we can create a place for people to use that is not, say, a stoop, and to

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

hopefully take advantage of services to stop using. This does go against the right wing urge to punish those who use drugs, but it's a data-supported and common sense way to cut down on the prevalence of needles in public spaces as well as helping people kick the habit and get access to services.

Question 8: What is your plan to address the longstanding shortage of affordable housing construction and create homes for residents, in addition to subsidized housing for low-income residents and formerly unhoused residents?

Attim Boykin: Create some financial incentives for vacant buildings to sell or rent, exploring all barriers that reduce housing in Portland, rezoning areas that district majorities and other entities believe are viable options to build affordable housing, support agencies who are focused on building housing for the unhoused to thrive and lead.

Nancy English: I would ask the City Council to support establishing a task force to rewrite city ordinances and incentivize building. The inclusionary zoning requirement now on the books is too high and is impeding construction. Renters and builders and planners could work together to devise what would allow the most units to be built as soon as possible. The planning process itself could be reviewed and revised to make this easier too, with whatever can be safely streamlined. City bond funding to help build and maintain housing could be undertaken if it proves to be economically feasible and a wise investment.

Catherine Nekoie: The Recode, current Section 8, and City Voucher programs are designed to help find housing for formerly unhoused residents. To further address the housing issue, we should reach out to private landlords in the area and encourage their cooperation in housing these individuals. By providing education, guidance, and 'support' to landlords, we can potentially increase available housing options and make an impact on our community's housing challenges.

Robert O'Brien: Minimum unit counts in new construction (some developments are underbuilding what zoning allows); priority corridors like Washington and Forest Ave with greater density allowances; enhanced public transportation in those corridors so developers can realistically build with lower parking ratios; revise inclusionary zoning to incentivize more units in smaller projects; support housing-first like Logan Place at appropriate locations; restrict STR licenses while vacancy rates are low; moratorium on hotels until they reach a high threshold of occupancy rate, or explore requiring a housing component as part of hotel developments like the Eastland once had. Support Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) projects that have a local feeder for tenants. Leverage Tax-Increment Financing (TIF) in exchange for rent caps at median rates. Lots to explore!

Wes Pelletier: Along with other candidates, I'm hugely in favor of a social housing program that, rather than our current standard of using tax dollars to subsidize housing, instead invests city equity into affordable and mixed-income housing projects so that we can see a return on our investment while also creating housing that our working class is able to afford.

Question 9: What is your opinion of ReCode and its potential impact on the city?

Attim Boykin: I think recode needs greater transparency and the inclusion of more voices. It appears no one truly knows what recode is and how it will actually roll out, as it's been in planning

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

since 2017, I believe, and that doesn't take into account the 2020 boom or current city or state Circumstances.

Nancy English: ReCode is a work in progress with integration of comments solicited by the Planning Department still to come. I look forward to seeing the final draft of this multi-year work and applaud the added density to many neighborhoods and taller buildings along the highest points of the peninsula and in some areas of downtown. We would be best served by adding housing, retail, and businesses where our residents are most concentrated.

Catherine Nekoie: Currently, the Recode is in the next stage of revisions. I am closely monitoring its progress and feel optimistic about the direction it is taking.

Robert O'Brien: Portland desperately needed a code overhaul. Portland ReCode was a good faith effort and there are a lot of good changes and streamlining in the new code. It loosens up dimensional, usage, and parking requirements on development which should have a positive impact. As a bureaucratic project, it had some setbacks: it started and stopped because of COVID, funding, and staffing limitations; there has also been a considerable amount of administrative, staff, consultant, and political turnover during the process. I was on the historic preservation board this spring when staff presented draft changes; there were more questions answered than suggestions accepted. But overall I support the changes in ReCode and look forward to putting it to work.

Wes Pelletier: I have been monitoring the recode process as presented by City staff and been listening to community input in the course of campaigning. The zoning reforms proposed have the potential to be helpful in addressing the housing affordability crisis, but we may need to look at further reducing barriers to denser, more sustainable housing options citywide. It is particularly important to increase the density in the off-peninsula neighborhoods and along our main corridors (Forest, Brighton, Washington, etc) so that we can start to ease the housing crisis and be prepared for future climate-change driven growth. We also need to be sure to pair denser zoning with programs that allow for different ownership models that will achieve the mixed-income housing Portland so badly needs.

Question 10: With regard to the city budget, in what areas would you recommend significant changes – increases, decreases, process, etc.?

Atiim Boykin: I don't have insight into the budget enough to formulate an opinion at this time.

Nancy English: I would support substantial increases to the Behavioral Health Unit of the Police Department (PD), along with agreement with the broader PD and the City's social services workers about how to make effective investments to help people suffering from mental illness and substance abuse disorder. Next, combined with sidewalk repair for ADA compliance and street maintenance, I would support increases to the Forestry Division of the Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Department for street tree planting and care. This last increase should focus on climate change resilience including Zoning, Sustainability Division initiatives, and State of Maine programs. Building a budget is a multi-week, multi-department process and only by participating would I determine any decreases.

Catherine Nekoie: Let's focus on the everyday issues that affect our residents, such as the cost of purple bags, uneven sidewalks, potholes, needles, trash, bike thefts, and car break-ins. By addressing

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

these practical concerns, we can significantly enhance the daily experience for everyone in our beautiful city. Often, it's the small things that make the biggest difference.

Robert O'Brien: In recent years, the City was caught off guard with the refugee crisis, the surge in homelessness, COVID, and new referenda laws. The City tried to cover as many new expenses with ARPA funds and supplemental allocations from the State, but there's still a significant cost-burden for local taxpayers. We need a funding plan going forward. I would like to see our mayor prioritize his time in lobbying efforts to consolidate local social services at the County level. The County already coordinates the Sheriff's Department, the jails, and 9-1-1 emergency response. Why not social services? It would reduce duplication, maximize efficiencies, and spread the financial burden to more communities than just the urban service centers. Plus the funding would capture more revenue from non-residents than income tax (ie, State tax) would. I would like to see the mayor push in Augusta to allow local communities the right to impose up to a 1% tax on lodging and/or dining. Use these revenues from (mostly) tourists to defray and bolster infrastructure budgets, school budgets, fire/safety, or social services. (I would be open to exempting residents by showing an ID to waive the tax). Tourism is one of our biggest cash crops — why are we not harvesting more?

Wes Pelletier: This question is impossible to answer in 100 words, but one of the most obvious short-comings in our city government is its lack of staff coverage, which results in many folks being unable to tell what, exactly, the city is doing for them, whether it's in filing forms or sweeping the streets (or making you move your car and not sweeping the streets). In talking with rank-and-file city staff, this staffing shortage is due almost entirely to the extremely non-competitive wages offered. By raising wages for rank-and-file staff, we'll begin to have a city that is ready and willing to work for its citizens.

Question 11: How should the city respond to the sea level rise and combat climate change?

Atiim Boykin: Building codes, shade trees, removal of the Sprague Coal Pile, re-install a Trolley System, prioritize public transportation with public and private funding.

Nancy English: We all need to hear about and see the waterfront flooding that is now commonplace; to adopt all the non-greenhouse-gas-emitting energy sources we can; and to continue to invest in renewable energy. Every proposal that helps us to combat climate change needs to be considered!

Catherine Nekoie: I support efforts to improve building reconstruction in affected areas, ensuring that if rebuilding is necessary, it incorporates renewable and clean energy sources such as wind, solar, and wave energy. By using sustainable practices, we will contribute to a greener and more resilient future for Portland.

Robert O'Brien: We need a long-term plan and a budget for it. To get there we need to test several approaches and examine their financial impacts. For example, if we allow Commercial Street to flood strategically, how will the soils be structurally affected by prolonged saturation (Commercial Street's soil is mostly fill). We can move utilities to upper floors in Commercial Street buildings, but can the historic building frames withstand regular flooding? What are the tax implications if valuations plummet on Commercial Street and that tax burden is transferred to the rest of taxpayers? Is it time to talk about a sea wall at the mouth of Portland Harbor some day? Could it be paid for by

Portland Voices Candidate Survey

imbedding tidal power generation into the walls? These are all questions to ask, test, and ultimately plan for.

Wes Pelletier: As the biggest city in one of the most climate-stable states in the country, we need to be prepared for a large influx of people, and we very obviously are not. We can get there by building housing, transit, and maritime infrastructure as well as a strong, diverse, compassionate community that is ready to work as one to tackle the huge challenges we are facing and will continue to face.

Question 12: In 2026, the city budget will have \$22.3 million open annually upon retirement of the pension obligation bonds. What is your top priority for that money?

Atiim Boykin: Whatever my constituents prioritize.

Nancy English: Stabilizing property taxes must be a top priority. But that said, the economics of Fiscal Year 2026 (if this bond retirement occurs within that year, or Fiscal Year 2027 if it's in the next six months of 2026) will be the dominant consideration as the City Council Finance Committee and the city's Finance Department craft the budget. I can't second guess the future. My top priority for any budgetary change is to work with city departments to sustain the more effective and capable city government possible, while keeping taxes stable.

Catherine Nekoie: We should work to reduce parking and housing costs for employees of local businesses so they have enough employees. Additionally, offering small low-interest loans to businesses and commercial property owners for façade upgrades can enhance their appearance and attractiveness, helping to draw in more businesses, customers, and foster growth. I remain committed to supporting tree planting initiatives aimed at combating climate change, particularly in areas with sparse tree canopies. Expanding green spaces will help reduce our carbon footprint and enhance the environment in those regions. Restoring heavy item pickup for residents would also contribute to a cleaner and more efficient community.

Robert O'Brien: I'm glad you asked this because this is not on many people's radars and is rarely mentioned in the press. I think top priority should be for property tax relief. Yes, we have competing, unfunded needs in the city, but let's build those budgets from a zero-basis (from the ground up) and decide what we as a city can afford. When Gov. LePage's budget shifted pension obligations to the towns, it was done so suddenly to balance the State budget, and property taxes largely covered the new expenses. Let's return the savings back to the source. Portland property taxes are exceedingly high compared to other regions of the country.

Wes Pelletier: More than anything, the city needs affordable and mixed-income housing, and rather than throwing money into subsidies, we should be investing equity into affordable developments as part of a municipal social housing project, as I outlined in my earlier answer.