

Questionnaire on Community Health and Community Development for Candidates for Mayor of Boston

Responses of Charlotte Golar Richie

Since we will agree that social determinants play a critical role in the overall health of our communities, I want to integrate the issues of concern expressed by this questionnaire into a comprehensive response that reflects their interconnectedness. First, let me state that I agree that the overall health of a community is also driven in large part by many social determinants. Some of Boston's residents enjoy a healthier standard of living than others and inequities do exist across various communities. Fortunately, Boston has a long history of addressing the health needs of its residents. We are home to the oldest public health department in the country and The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) has a long track record for innovation in public health. More recently, Boston was one of the first cities in the US to address racial and ethnic disparities in health care and the BPHC founded the Center for Health Equity and Social Justice to improve health in communities of color. As Mayor, my vision is that of one Boston, where the health of one community is connected to the health of every community. I will give top priority to the BPHC mission of protecting the health of our most vulnerable residents. At the most fundamental level, this assures that residents feel safe in their homes, neighborhoods and schools. On a community level, residents need to have access to healthy food options, and healthy living and working environments. I want to work on reducing the disparities that hold Bostonians back from a full and healthy life. As we improve the health of the public, we improve the health of our City.

- 1. Community Health and Racial Inequities: *Mayor Menino has been an effective advocate for reducing racial and ethnic health inequities. What will you do to build on that work?***

- 2. Community Resilience: *What would you do to develop systems and skills that increase the resilience of residents in neighborhoods experiencing high rates of violence, substance abuse, suicide and other community traumas?***

- 7. Health Care Access: *What will you do to ensure that the large non-English speaking population has access to and receives culturally appropriate high quality health care?***

Although health inequities are directly related to the existence of historical and current discrimination and social injustice, one of the most modifiable factors is the lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services to impacted communities. Providers of healthcare services, including institutions, educators, practitioners and others have a direct impact on health inequities and disparities. Health care delivery services should be respectful of and responsive to

the cultural and linguistic needs of all individuals. I think the delivery of services can be improved at the local, state, regional and federal levels and I would focus on developing a coordinated plan with community-based organizations, for delivering more culturally-based outreach and awareness initiatives. The “Framework for Eliminating Health Disparities” created by the Commonwealth’s Health Disparities Council provides an well recognized structure for assessing the City’s progress in reducing health disparities.

3. Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence: *What is one thing that you, as Mayor, think is the most important way to decrease domestic/Intimate partner abuse, which accounts for a significant portion of assaults in Boston?*

8. HIV/AIDS: *Overall, Boston and MA has significantly reduced the rate of new HIV infections, except in communities of color. How will you work to address this epidemic among Black and Latino communities, including the LGBT members of those communities?*

13. Substance Use and Prevention: *How would you improve the provision of prevention of and treatment for substance abuse?*

While progress has been made in bringing a better public understanding to these medical and social diseases, more work remains to be done. Public education is also still the most effective way to combat the pervasive and persistent presence of these medical and social disease. Since these issues affect a broad range of age groups, I think early education with our teenage population; along with effective public awareness campaigns for the general population can and should be a primary focus of government. Boston has been a national leader on these issues and we certainly have a wealth of the service providers across the City that can be leveraged for greater results. My primary focus would be to look at all existing programs and services and ensure that they are part of a strategic and well-coordinated effort to achieve maximum results. Additional resources would be considered if they were determined to be a factor in our efforts.

4. Education:

4.a. *Given the importance of good early childhood care and education as a predictor for lifelong health, what will you do to increase the number of children, particularly in communities of color, in such education programs and enhance the quality of those programs?*

4.b. *What is the most important goal you will tell your new BPS Superintendent to work towards and why?*

Boston has a proud legacy as the birthplace of public education. Boston Public Schools (BPS) has been credited with delivering the best education possible to some of our students. I know this personally as a mother of two girls who graduated from public school system and went on to top-tier universities. I also know full well that disparities exist within the system. As Mayor, I want to focus on giving every young person access to a world-class public education, starting with. I want to invest capital resources in quality school facilities that inspire students to come and feel welcome. School facilities like East Boston High, Jeremiah Burke, and Mildred Avenue. My directive to the new Superintendent is to implement proven approaches to academic excellence throughout the school district and draw from lessons learned from our high-performing “Level 1” schools. I want to work with our pilot and charter schools to strengthen the existing connections between autonomous BPS sites and traditional district schools. Whatever successes we are achieving in autonomous BPS schools should be shared with traditional schools. Earlier this year, President Obama, as part of his fiscal 2014 budget, proposed a new program that would provide funding for states to offer pre-K to all 4-year-olds from low-income families. The President’s proposal includes \$750 million in discretionary funding to help states build capacity for implementing high-quality programs. Since Boston is already considered a national model by some for our high-quality pre-K curriculum, my focus as Mayor would be to ensure that Boston pursues this new funding and use it to expand the number of available seats across our various neighborhoods.

Lastly, we can all sympathize with the difficulty of trying to learn when you are hungry, or afraid of violence, or with limited English skills, or stressed from family crisis. I want to better align parents, teachers, community groups and social service providers to ensure the array of support services are available to those families in need. With this broader community approach, schools will serve as an oasis of opportunity. Teachers will be more focused on teaching, mentoring and inspiring their students.

5. Environmental Issues: *What additional measures will you take to improve the air quality, particularly in neighborhoods with industrial sites, waste transfer sites, and highways?*

Both Boston and Massachusetts are national and global leaders in advancing clean energy and addressing climate change. As Mayor, I want to make Boston the "Greenest City" in the nation. Boston, with its walk-able neighborhoods, extensive public transit system, and environmentally conscious residents, is ideally suited to be a model for the type of urban development that will mitigate the effects of climate change, attract economic development, and improve our quality of life. I propose decreasing greenhouse gas emissions with multi-sector programs designed for positive impact. I am also opposed to any incineration expansion within Boston or in any nearby municipalities that might adversely impact Boston, especially in regards to our air quality. I will double our recycling rate and reduce the use of non-recyclable or non-biodegradable materials,

and create a program to vastly expand the diversion of organic waste matter into composting or anaerobic digestion, all of which, will obviate the need for expansion of an incinerating facility, and hopefully lead to the closure of many. My vision for Boston is a city that generates zero waste in 10 years.

6. Gambling: *In what ways will you ensure that mitigation money from an East Boston casino benefit the residents of East Boston and the City of Boston?*

My major concerns are the impacts upon traffic, transportation, public safety, and the societal disruption that is often caused gaming facilities. I would, require that the City treasurer establish a designated account any mitigation funds and implement a transparent process for utilizing he funds to support services that address any negative impact of the casino's siting.

9. Homelessness: *What will your administration do differently to address the issue of homelessness, particularly for families with children?*

No single program or system has the capacity to solve the growing and complex problem of homelessness—collaboration at the Federal, State and local levels must occur to create true systems of integration and change. I do have strong record of advocacy on behalf of our homeless population. As Director of the Department of Neighborhood Development, I was instrumental in developing the City's "***Leading the Way***" strategy that introduced the concept of comprehensive housing strategies. The strategy focused on housing production goals and other established benchmarks. We established a number of pilot and demonstration programs, such as the Boston Homelessness Prevention Clearinghouse Initiative. These programs placed homeless individuals directly from the streets into permanent supportive housing. We also reprioritized federal funding toward permanent housing solutions for the chronically homeless. The number of homeless individual adults in more supportive living environments (e.g., transitional housing or recovery homes) as opposed to emergency shelter has almost doubled from 2002-2008. These efforts contributed to significant declines in the number of adults in conventional emergency shelter: a 45% decrease from 2,394 in 2002 to 1,318 in 2009.

I still believe that prevention is the first and most important line of defense against homelessness. At the federal level, The Homeless Policy Academy Initiative was designed to help State and local policymakers improve access to mainstream services for individuals and families with children who are homeless. This initiative has created momentum to address homelessness as exemplified in the tangible results in all many localities across the nation. Homelessness is clearly a complex issue and the response to homelessness is also extremely complex and cannot be addressed with a one-size-fits all approach. Here in Massachusetts, we have enhanced State infrastructures to address homelessness, targeted use of data, developed action plans, created and enhancement more collaborative relationships, improved access to mainstream resources, and

developed and implemented homelessness prevention strategies. As Mayor, I want to focus on bringing new models that have proven successful elsewhere and integrate them into our existing infrastructure of services and keep Boston the cutting edge of developing solutions to this this national problem.

10. Housing:

10.a. What creative plans do you have for addressing the need for more housing that is affordable for working families who do not qualify for subsidized housing but cannot afford market rate housing by increasing resources through linkage, inclusionary development and other tools?

10.b. Would you be willing to implement a health-based housing standard for all rehab investments made by the City that ensures the creation of healthier housing by addressing home-based environmental health hazards and energy efficiency to reduce the high costs of asthma, lead poisoning, trip & fall injuries and energy in low to moderate income homes?

My record of advocating for and providing housing opportunities to all residents is well established. As a State Representative, I sponsored a \$296 million housing bond bill to develop and preserve affordable housing across the State. Boston's Inclusionary Development Policy was developed and implemented during my tenure as Chief of Housing and Director of the Department of Neighborhood Development. Prior to this, there had been no policy. In my view, it has been a valuable tool for creating affordable housing options for many of Boston's residents. As Mayor, I would increase the percentage of units required to be affordable on new construction where certain conditions exist, such as the development of public land and/or public funding is sought. To expand our inventory of housing options for middle class residents, I support increasing all available financial resources and statutory tool to the fullest extent possible without jeopardizing Boston's fiscal soundness. All of these resources are critical for the continuation of providing affordable housing opportunities to our residents.

I would also work to increase Boston's inventory of "healthy" housing. The BRA already has a history of promoting green construction through the adoption of stringent green building standards. I am in favor of increasing the use of these standards for smaller housing projects if it does not add any additional financial hardship. We can also develop incentives for developers to use sustainable, green strategies. I would also look at existing city regulations to make sure they are up to date and addressing 21st century needs for safe and healthy housing.

11. Jobs and Youth: *How will you improve the opportunities for Boston youth to be employed in the health, science, education, and social services sector which account for one third of Boston's jobs?*

Boston and Massachusetts are fortunate to have many good paying jobs that do not require post-secondary degrees. Our diverse economy provides a wealth of opportunities that can be leveraged to support increased employment amongst our young residents. Improving the career options of youth across Boston will be a priority of my administration. There is now a renewed interest in introducing job readiness and workforce development curricula in secondary schools. In addition, our community colleges are also being asked to expand their role in preparing our workforce for today's jobs. Opportunities abound for new jobs in new industries in a 21st century economy and access to these opportunities should be extended to all our residents as we continue climbing out of a national recession. Preparation begins with access to a quality education and it is our responsibility to prepare our youth to be productive citizens that contribute to the overall well-being of our city.

12. Neighborhood Economic Development and Planning: *What specific changes in zoning, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and development processes will you advocate for in Boston's lower socioeconomic status neighborhoods that will be responsive to local input and spur economic improvement and jobs?*

I want to see a thoughtful and inclusive approach to development in our neighborhoods. In 2012, Boston enjoyed the start of 22 major development projects worth \$1.6 billion. As Mayor, I want to continue supporting development that expands our economic base, and provides housing and jobs opportunities to our residents. Every resident has a right to participate in an open and transparent development process. I am in favor of implementing the following as a way of improving our current development processes:

- Further streamlined Article 80
- More clearly defined Community Advisory Council's review process – minus the politics
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities of the BRA and participants in the review process
- Investing in new technologies that further improve the permitting and licensing process.

14. Transportation: *Given the MBTA's fiscal problems, how would you improve access to public transportation, particularly in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods?*

The MBTA had a record breaking year for fy2013 and collected more than a half-billion dollars in fare revenue. This represents nearly \$100 million more than the previous year and shows that the MBTA continues to be a much utilized alternative for thousands of commuters. With an

improved fiscal condition, we now have an opportunity to begin addressing some of the systemic challenges that have left many Boston residents feeling underserved by public transportation. As Mayor, my role is to work with State transportation officials and the Massachusetts Legislature to develop new solutions that will effect positive changes in Boston's public system.

15. Violence Prevention/Public Safety: *What changes will you make to dramatically reduce the amount of violence in communities of color?*

The next mayor must recognize the disparities in Boston's public safety and crime prevention efforts. She must be attuned to how different communities interact with those public safety officials responsible for their safety and well-being. This requires respectful, trusting and collaborative relationships amongst all parties. Public safety officials at every level must also reflect the diversity of our city. As our next Mayor, I will ensure our police department maintains a neighborhood focus and that the City's response to crime is matched with the needs in each of our neighborhoods. This includes a renewed commitment to Community Policing at all ranks of the police department. Just as staff is currently required to train and retrain on the use of firearms, all public safety staff should take community policing workshops on a routine basis and deploy the latest tools and resources.

I would also implement a Community Advisory Committee in each of our police districts. Members would include the District Captain and local residents. They would be charged with reviewing existing crime data to determine public safety priorities and have frank discussions on strategies to deal with specific safety issues that are of most concern to the community.