

# Dorchester Reporter

“The News and Values Around the Neighborhood”

## 2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

### Section 1: BACKGROUND

1. **What is your name, age, place of birth and present address?**  
Lorraine Payne Wheeler, Boston, 85 Moreland St. Roxbury, MA 02119

2. **What is your present occupation? Also, please note any past employment that may be relevant to your candidacy.** Lawyer, previously employed at Boston University Medical Campus. I took courses at the School of Public Health while employed there and worked on planning various projects.

3. **Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.** J.D. from Suffolk University, Masters Urban Affairs , Boston University, B.S. Business Administration, Boston University.

3. **Please list some of your affiliations with non-profits, civic associations and political groups.** Chair, Roxbury Path Forward Neighborhood Association, Chair, Civil Rights Public Art Project in Gertrude Howes Park, Member, Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee, Board Member, Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corp. Board Member, Yawkey Boys and Girls Club of Roxbury

5. **What in your experience to date will most help you to be an effective leader?** I organize Roxbury Path Forward neighborhood Association where I have confronted literally every issue coming to the council. Everything from potholes and cracked sidewalks to projects seeking 10 or 15 variances, or gang graffiti and violence. I have been a manager of an accounting department so I have experience with budgeting. I am an attorney with experience in landlord tenant law and development. I also have a Masters degree in urban affairs and planning.

6. **What are the three accomplishments you're most proud of?**

- 1) I am proud of raising my son, with my husband, into adulthood
- 2) I am proud of writing the grant that funded the design of a public art project honoring the Civil Rights Era in Roxbury. The Committee that I chair is still working on obtaining grant money to install the project.
- 3) I am proud of using my education for the good of my community by organizing groups like Roxbury Path Forward Neighborhood Association or Roxbury United Neighbors (RUN) that give voice to the issues facing community members

7. **Are you a member of a union?** No
8. **Please list any endorsements to date.** None

## **Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS**

1. **What is your party affiliation and how would you characterize your political ideology?** I am a democrat who is liberal and socially progressive.

2. **Please name up to three (and at least one) of your political role models? Please feel free to explain your choices.**

There are so many people to choose from. I have loved reading about Stacy Abrams and her family. She played a pivotal role in getting President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris by registering voters in Georgia. She is also very qualified from serving in the Georgia House of Representatives for 11 years.

3. **Are you in favor of term limits for the seat you are seeking? If so, how many terms?** No. But I could imagine a time when all of the City Council members could be city wide rather than represent an individual district. In meeting residents, you hear many of the same issues confronting people who live in neighborhoods across Boston .

4. **What would you do to increase voter turnout in the city of Boston? Do you favor same-day voter registration or lowering the voting age to 16? Do you favor mail-in voting?** Voter turnout could be increased by making vote-by-mail permanent. Vote-by-mail and early voting provide much greater flexibility for people who want to vote but may have a difficult work schedule.

Federal legislation has been introduced to change the voting age to 16 reflecting the advocacy shown by so many teens. Their engagement on varied issues has been tremendous and shows their commitment to democracy. At the same time, there is so much pressure on young people already to assume adult roles early. In several states, residents are getting a chance to vote on lowering the voting age. I'd prefer letting Massachusetts residents get a chance to vote on lowering the voting age to 16.

5. **Do you think that Boston should adopt a rank-choice voting system in upcoming election cycles?** Yes. Although, it also seems to complicate the election of candidates. In the New York City Mayor's election, it took several days to get election results, which makes people less confident about voting.

## **Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES**

**1. What is your top priority if elected?** Housing affordability is my top priority. Across District 7 people are concerned about struggling tenants being displaced by the high cost of rent. The Covid-19 epidemic is also having an impact. Making anyone homeless right now due to eviction because of layoffs resulting from the pandemic trouble from the pandemic would

**2. How will you approach the issue of gun violence in our communities?** In District 7, there are many violent incidents involving a gun. The community needs new partnerships that involve residents in solving the problem. Solutions in these communities must recognize the existence of racially based inequities. I would look for ways to provide job training and fund youth development programs. A community driven solution recommended by residents in Grove Hall is a community center for youth. The City should fund it.

**3. Is there a specific city agency you see as in need of urgent reform? If so, please explain.** The planning agency could use reform. Residents have had so many issues this year. There were projects in Roxbury where Roxbury residents were not notified. Also, Projects where the presentation and comment period were too close to holidays. A project in Nubian Square offered so-called supporters something of value in exchange for speaking up in favor of the project. There are still too many ways to inappropriately influence development.

**4. What is your position on residency, i.e. requiring people hired by the municipal government to live in the city of Boston?** As long as the cost of housing remains unaffordable to many, It doesn't seem reasonable to require residency of municipal employees whose salaries many not be in line with housing costs.

**5. The city of Boston presently owns and manages the historic Strand Theater in Uphams Corner. How would you seek to program, market and utilize this asset?** The Strand Theatre will be impacted by the revitalization plans for the area. The Uphams Corner Arts and Innovation District provides a framework for residents to use their entrepreneurial talents to boost the area's economic development. Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corp. where I am a board member has a small business development and loan program for area businesses. The Strand Theatre is an important part of the District. There is a significant amount of event related spending that could be leveraged in Uphams Corner. As City Councilor, I can work to fund any studies or pilot projects needed to understand how to increase nonlocal arts attendance. Increasing visitors to the theatre, neighborhood restaurants, and marketed events will bring tourism dollars and significant economic reward to Uphams Corner.

**6. What is your position on vaccinations? Should students be required to be vaccinated for Covid-19 to attend school in**

**Boston?** So far students under 12 have not been approved by the FDA for the vaccine. It's a good idea for older students to be vaccinated. We may come to the point of mandatory vaccination but not yet. Perhaps masks should be made mandatory first.

**7. Do you favor a return to an elected School Committee? Please explain.** I favor a hybrid school committee so that the oversight of Boston schools represents a mix between accountability and educational experience. Under a hybrid system, the Mayor can continue to appoint some individuals with training and experience in the education field, which is needed. But residents have been clear about needing greater accountability from the School committee. I support that by advocating that some members of the School committee be appointed.

**8. Do you support the recent decision of the BPS and School Committee to alter the admission plan for the city's three exam schools?** Yes, I support the decision because it reflects the moment and will bring greater diversity to the exam schools.

**9. Do you support the citywide ballot question that would hand new budgetary powers to the City Council?** Yes.

**10. The city of Boston is presently without a permanent police commissioner. What should the next mayor do to fill the position and what type of person should be selected to lead the BPD?** The Mayor should use a public process to vet candidates for the position. People have long memories. It will take a long time to move past the scandals that recently came to light. The person selected as Commissioner should have a demonstrated commitment to bringing transparency to the police department and to working with the Office of Police Accountability and Transparency (OPAT). In some segments of the community, the strain is particularly felt with BIPOC groups, police have lost the public's trust from the missteps exposed by recent scandals.

**11. Do you support the redevelopment of City Hall and City Hall Plaza?** The plans look wonderful and will bring new life to the plaza. More importantly, the plans will make City Hall accessible to people with disabilities. After 50 years, the space needed an upgrade.

**12. What is your assessment of the Climate Ready Boston initiative conceived and executed to date by the Walsh administration? Is this initiative a sufficient response to prepare for the anticipated climate change in coming years and decades? What else might you do to build climate resiliency in the city of Boston?**

The Climate Ready Boston Initiative is not enough. Even if fully implemented, it would not improve the environment for decades. I would improve development planning in Boston and devote more city funding to street trees and parks. . There are buildings in East Boston and the Seaport where the ground floor was built below the flood level. In some

cases, these issues were pointed out by residents but the buildings were approved anyway. In District 7, the Friends of Melnea Cass Blvd. fought the construction plan to remove mature trees along the corridor. The City finally decided to stop the plan and the residents are advocating for the city to fund a formal Greenway along Melnea Cass Boulevard.

**13. A millionaires tax is expected to be on the statewide ballot in 2022. How do you plan to vote?** I plan to vote yes because the tax would raise money for transportation and education. People in the top 1% of income pay little in income tax because the code provides them with opportunities that those at lower income levels do not get.

**14. Should gig workers be considered company employees, rather than independent contractors?** Yes.

**15. A report commissioned by the Walsh administration found that just 1.2 percent of city contracts awarded between 2014-2018 were awarded to Black or Latino-owned businesses. What would you do to change that?** As part of the development of Parcel 3, the BPDA held meetings with minority contractors to ask for recommendations that would increase their participation and to identify other individuals and companies prepared to work on these projects. More should be done by larger private construction companies to increase participation by MBE/MBW subcontractors on building projects in the City. The talent exists in Boston's communities of color. Based on my experience with the Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee, I will advocate for the existing barriers to contracting to be removed.

**16. In 2018, the Walsh administration set a goal of creating 69,000 new units of housing in Boston by 2030. What is your assessment of this target — and what would your office do to balance growth with the concerns that many have about displacement in neighborhoods like Dorchester?** In 2018, the target was raised up from the 2014 goal of 53,000. We do not know what the long term impact of Covid19 will be on work and housing. Some City residents are working at home now and want more space because they're spending more time there. Others have left the City entirely because they have flexibility, want to live in more affordable communities with backyard space, or they leave to be closer to family. In parts of Roxbury and Dorchester, people have enjoyed the best of both worlds by living in the city and also enjoying their back yards. Homeowners rented an extra apartment unit to family or friends. People have made it clear to the City that they want a variety of housing options. But as low-income neighborhoods attract higher income residents, residents complain about density. My office would seek to balance neighborhood change to prevent displacement. There are efforts to balance new construction types and affordability. In Nubian Square, it tends to be apartments, some small. Family sized homes have been built on city owned land in the Garrison Trotter

neighborhood as part of the Mayor's Middle Income Housing Initiative. Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corp. and Preservation of Affordable Housing were recently selected to build 66 affordable units in Uphams Corner. I support rent control to limit rent increases or building clear-outs, but there are a range of ways to subsidize the cost of housing. Most important among these are providing opportunities for affordable homeownership. For some time, it will be a continual assessment of changing market conditions. .

**17. What is your assessment of the Walsh administration's overall performance? Please offer a letter grade or pass/fail as part of your answer.** C The Walsh administration did many good things like improving playgrounds across the City and hiring a more diverse staff at City Hall. They had a plan to renovate City Hall to make it accessible and even improved some of the corners of the building by creating meeting spaces. Even the beer hall on City Hall plaza was a nice touch. The City benefited from the goals for construction of housing, but there was not enough communication with residents. Too many people are being displaced from their neighborhoods in Boston. There are major apartment complexes that are expiring use project where residents, many of them seniors and families, are in fear of being evicted.

**18. What is your assessment of the acting Mayor Kim Janey's performance since taking office in March 2021? Please offer a letter grade or pass/fail as part of your answer.** Pass. It's been more of the same mixed bag. Positives include the pilot project for free buses on Route 28, intentional tourism program highlighting people of color and neighborhoods. There is more opportunity for people of color to engage in contracting with the City- all of which happened during acting Mayor Janey's few months in office. However, the issues with displacement, violence in Black and brown neighborhoods and lack of opportunities for residents have not been addressed as well.

**19. Will you seek to expand or change the composition of the Zoning Board of Appeals? If so, how?** As the leader of a neighborhood association, I have been at the Zoning Board of Appeals hearings many times. I have organized or attended 50 or more meetings about housing developments. During the construction boom in Boston, I have seen abutters and neighbors of projects in Roxbury ignored by the ZBA. Since the scandal, that has changed. Now, there is more of a sense of residents being heard about development in District 7. I think the ZBA in addition to having a position for an architect, unions, and real estate, should have a position for a person who would particularly represent the neighborhoods of Boston and environmental concerns. For example, residents are aware that some approved buildings are in danger of being below sea level.

**20. When not on the campaign trail, how do you unwind?** I like to read. Right now, I am reading *Race For Profit* by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. It's about how banks and the real estate industry have destroyed Black homeownership by undervaluing the segregated neighborhoods

where most Black and brown people live. I like to garden a bit or go out for dinner.

**21. If you were not a candidate, who would you support in this election for either Mayor or City Council?** I am answering this question by sharing the evaluation system that I use when voting for candidates for office. Any candidate that I would support has to possess a track record of commitment and involvement in the issues that are important to the people they represent. Don't tell me what you are going to do if elected because it's your experience that tells me how you will approach issues. Will you involve residents and listen to their ideas or will you send staff to neighborhood meetings and be involved only at a distance? Will you form committees that give additional opportunities for honest sharing of approaches to tackle problems or will you limit your exposure to financial supporters? Do you believe in transparency? Do your actions reflect that? I want someone who has demonstrated knowledge about issues as well as action.

Thank you for participating in the Dorchester Reporter questionnaire. Please send the completed document as a PDF or WordDoc to [newseditor@dotnews.com](mailto:newseditor@dotnews.com) by Fri. Aug. 8, 2021.