

Progressive Democrats of Somerville Questionnaire 2007

1. What political or community activism accomplishments are you most proud of during your last term in office (or the last two years if you have not previously served)? What specific things do you want to accomplish during the coming term?

My greatest political accomplishment in the last two years was expanding the Public Policy Series at Homes for Families. Homes for Families is a statewide advocacy organization whose aim is to end family homelessness. The Public Policy Series teaches and involves homeless and formerly homeless parents in the state budget process. Over the three years I worked at Homes for Families, I expanded the group beyond one series that served as an introduction to the state budget process to three concurrent series. In addition, before I transitioned into my job as the Policy Director for the Senate Housing Committee, I worked with a graduate of the Public Policy Series to become the new coordinator of the Series and together we developed plans to add on a class targeted to Spanish speakers. After developing concrete solutions to end family homelessness and learning how the state budget process relates to the solutions to family homelessness, the participants all started voting regularly, calling their legislators, reaching out to families still in shelter to get them involved in public policy, speaking at legislative breakfasts, and playing a large role in increasing funding for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program, the state rental subsidy program that helps over 4,500 extremely low income households afford rent in Massachusetts.

In addition to expanding the Public Policy Series, while I was working at Homes for Families, I created and organized the Housing Solutions Campaign, a statewide coalition formed to increase funding for MRVP. In 1990, MRVP assisted nearly 20,000 households in Massachusetts. Over the years, MRVP shrunk to 4,500 households. Without more funding, the program would continue to shrink. Also, the subsidies were too low to prevent people from spiraling into homelessness. The Housing Solutions Campaign brought together over 60 organizations across the state representing homeless shelters, housing agencies, foundations, community development corporations, and others. Together, the Coalition convinced the Legislature to reinvest in MRVP. As a result, over \$3 million has been restored to the program over the last three years, hundreds of more vouchers have been issued and vouchers have been adjusted so that households pay no more than 40% of their income to rent. The state has a renewed commitment to helping the lowest income households in Massachusetts afford rent and avoid homelessness.

As Alderman, I will open up the government decision making process for residents. I will reach out to different constituencies and to my neighbors to keep people up to date on the kinds of decisions being made by the Board of Alderman, the Mayor, and City departments. In addition to informing people about decisions being made, I will invite people to be a part of the process by making myself accessible by phone, e-mail, and for in person meetings as well as informing people about how decisions are being made in the City and where people can play a role in shaping policy.

In this coming term, I will identify all possible ways for Somerville to develop and preserve housing for all income levels. Somerville has many opportunities right now to do something on this issue. The City is considering the sale of public buildings, there are redevelopment proposals for Union Square, and there are condo conversions and new developments being planned. Each of these present opportunities to create housing for all income levels, which contributes to preserving the Somerville we all know and love; a Somerville that allows families to live here for generations, has options for young families, and welcomes new people.

2. How will you balance business development with the needs of low-income residents as the Green Line comes to Somerville?

Business development and the needs of low-income residents are not unrelated. Both contribute to the community. Somerville needs to think about how to keep the City affordable for small businesses, households of all income levels, and particularly for low-income households. One way to do this is to increase the inclusionary zoning policy used to develop housing from 12.5% of newly constructed units to 15% as is being considered in Union Square. In addition, building mixed use and mixed income buildings will allow for new businesses to move into Somerville without displacing older businesses and will add more units to the housing stock, moving us closer to meeting the great housing demand.

Somerville owns buildings in Union Square that are likely going to be sold. It is important to involve the community in this process to ensure that the buildings sold are put to the best use for the community. The sale of these buildings creates new opportunities for mixed use, mixed income housing and more parks, all of which contribute to a thriving community.

Mayor Curtatone's condominium conversion proposal would also assist low income households. As more rental units are converted to condominiums, we need to ensure that current tenants, especially elderly, disabled, and low income tenants, are given time to find affordable units and that they are compensated for moves they otherwise cannot afford.

3. Would you support instant runoff voting (or similar voting reforms) for city elections? Why or why not?

I do support instant runoff voting and other voting reforms, such as same day voter registration. We must do all that we can to involve more people in the political process and to encourage people to run for public office and get involved with the City's commissions. Instant runoff voting takes away the threat of candidates spoiling elections. This gives voters more freedom to vote their conscience and send a message to candidates and elected officials about their concerns and views of how government should function. This encourages participation because people feel that their votes are more meaningful.

4. Why is the gang ordinance not enforced, and what do you plan to do about it?

We need to look at why people join gangs. Only by understanding and addressing why people turn to gangs and violence will we adequately be able to solve the problems and keep gangs out of Somerville. The current ordinance does not eliminate gangs. The current ordinance eliminates groups of people from gathering when police find the group to be suspicious. We need to think more creatively about how to meet the needs of the youth in the City and make them feel that they are an important part of our community. Somerville also needs a strong community policing program. All three candidates for Chief of Police have significant community policing experience. We need to prioritize police officers working with neighborhoods, schools, youth groups, and others to foster relationships that keep gangs out of Somerville.

5. What specific steps will you take to strengthen the community policing program? What specific steps will you take to increase the civic involvement of immigrants?

As Alderman, I will prioritize community policing during the budget process, in regular conversations with the Chief of Police, and in discussions with various businesses, organizations, and residents. It is vital that there is investment in community policing from all levels of city government and the community. It is important that police officers and residents are getting out on foot in each neighborhood.

I will also work with the Board of Alderman, Chief of Police, the Mayor, and organizations in the City to host community policing trainings and educate residents about fighting crime in Somerville.

The immigrant population in Somerville needs to be welcomed and encouraged to participate. Somerville has an active Human Rights Commission and active immigrant organizations. I will meet with these groups on a regular basis to hear their concerns about living in Somerville. I will also serve as a resource and work with the City to help people new to the country figure out how to get the information and resources they need to succeed here in the U.S.

6. What specific steps will you take to promote pay equity in Somerville (see <http://www.mass.gov/women/payequity/payequity.htm#legislation>)?

I will support Senator Jehlen's pay equity legislation. I will also work with the Mayor, the Women's Commission, and departments in the City to ensure that staff are being paid according to their job responsibilities and experience and not based on their sex.

More, however, needs to be done to address the systemic reasons why women get paid less than men. I will work with the Women's Commission and others to develop concrete ways to increase equality for women in regards to pay, education, career opportunities, and general treatment in society. Clearly, Somerville cannot solve these problems on our own. We must also work with other efforts happening in Massachusetts and across the country to ensure that women have equal opportunities.

7. What will you do about Somerville's budget crunch?

As a city, we need to look at increasing revenue. One way to do this is through the Municipal Partnership Act proposed by Governor Patrick and supported by Mayor Curtatone. In addition to 1% or 2% meals tax, 1% room occupancy tax, closing property tax exemptions on phone company poles and equipment, allowing Somerville and all municipalities to opt into the Group Insurance Commission and the pension asset investment provision that are included in the proposed act, we need to examine all possible ways to raise revenue that are within the City's control and will not cause additional burdens on an already heavily property taxed Somerville.

8. How will you create a town-gown relationship with Tufts comparable to that of Cambridge and Boston with their universities?

Although it can be difficult for college students and residents surrounding universities to live in a shared space, we must recognize that both groups are part of our community. Tufts is a world class institution; a competitive university that people dream of attending. Somerville is an amazing city where so many wish to live and raise families. We must make both groups feel comfortable and a part of the community. Both groups contribute to the economic vitality and social fabric of Somerville. Cambridge and Boston have tensions with their universities as well, but by recognizing that both groups are important parts of their communities, they are able to take steps to address tensions. In order to foster a similar relationship, I will open up dialogue between the Tufts administration, student groups, and concerned Somerville and Medford residents. I will also talk with Cambridge and Boston about specific actions they have taken to ease tensions between residents and schools.

9. What are the special needs of your Ward?

Ward 7 is a wonderful place to live. The streets are filled with a mix of owners, renters, people who have lived here for generations, and newcomers. We have amazing restaurants, excellent access to public transportation because of our proximity to the subway, and a couple of wonderful parks. Ward 7 also has challenges. There is a frequent turnover of residents, a need for more playgrounds and parks, tensions between Tufts and residents, and very expensive housing. We need to identify ways to make Ward 7 more affordable and family-friendly. Neighbors comment that there are not as many kids in the neighborhood as there used to be and that there are not enough after-school programs for young children. People are moving to other communities or sending their kids to after-school programs in Cambridge. Between expensive housing and the expense of sending kids to programs in neighboring communities, Ward 7 has a difficult time keeping families in our Ward. Because of high housing costs, renters are moving to other communities where they can afford to buy or get more housing for less rent. These challenges are not unique to Ward 7, but are exacerbated by our particularly high housing costs. In addition, Somerville has the opportunity to learn from Ward 7 as the Green line expands through other parts of the City. We can make decisions now in places like Union

Square that will help other neighborhoods to avoid some of the challenges that Ward 7 faces today.

10. What else should we know about your candidacy?

I am running for Alderman because I want to make a difference. I have dedicated much of my youth and all of my career to getting people involved in the public policy process. Somerville has changed so much over the years and is going to continue to change over the next several years. I believe it is my responsibility to do all that I can to ensure that as we continue to change, we make decisions in a careful way that protect the people who live here now and welcome people who want to join our community. This means prioritizing transparent government decision-making, affordable housing for all income levels, strong schools, safe and clean streets, and a thriving business community.