



A Vision for Boston: Questions for the 2009 At-Large City Council Candidates

PUBLIC SAFETY

Do you believe Boston is safer now than it was four years ago? Are you committed to the neighborhood policing program and if so, with finances tight, how will you ensure the level of sworn officers needed to maintain it? Would you suggest any changes to the current strategy?



Felix Arroyo

Boston is safer than it was four years ago but we must always strive to do better and to further engage the entire community in crime prevention. As the grandson of a police officer, I have the utmost respect for our public safety workers and all of the men and women that put their lives on the line to protect ours. All of Boston's residents have the right to feel and be safe in our city. We must support community policing, ensure that our police and fire departments have the resources they need to do their jobs, maintain clean and well-lit parks, and ensure that we don't have abandoned buildings in our neighborhoods. I do believe that we must seek creative ways to reduce police overtime costs, in order to focus limited resources for public safety in other areas.

John Connolly

I will continue to make it a priority to preserve funding for real community policing, where officers walk and bike the beat and have long-term assignments to specific neighborhoods so that they become a part of the communities that they police. In turn, our police officers will be able to foster strong community partnerships with our neighborhood watch groups, civic organizations, community-based organizations, and youth workers to prevent crime and strengthen our neighborhoods.

If we want to make Boston safe and save countless tax dollars in the long-run, the foundation of our public safety strategy must be identifying and reaching out to at-risk or potentially at-risk children. We must engage families so that every child grows up in a supportive environment, and work to keep children on paths of opportunity and away from paths that lead to crime and violence. As a former school teacher of at-risk middle school children, I have seen first-hand how kids can be drawn into gangs, drug abuse, and crime at a very early age. To address one part of this challenge, I filed legislation pushing for Boston to adopt a new, ground-breaking approach to truancy focused on early intervention, parental accountability, and family engagement.

Tomas Gonzalez

Boston is safer than it was four years ago, but we can do more to make it an even safer city. I am committed to neighborhood policing because it will keep officers in contact with the community where they can have a greater, more meaningful impact. In times of tight finances, it is not neighborhood policing that should be cut - it is police details at construction sites. Without a new class at the police academy this year the only way to free up more officers to run community policing adequately is to use civilian flaggers. This is an unpopular idea in some parts of Boston but I firmly believe it is the right thing to do.

Tito Jackson

Boston residents are safest on the streets and in their homes when there the police force is fully staffed with qualified sworn officers, when these officers are seen as effective partners by members of every community, and when people have abundant economic opportunities to support themselves and their families. The neighborhood policing program is a critical part of maintaining a productive working relationship between the Boston Police Department and each of Boston's neighborhoods. As an At-Large City Councilor, I would continue to support it.

Given constraints imposed by the current financial situation, innovative solutions will be needed to help currently employed sworn officers be even more effective in ensuring the safety of Boston's communities. One approach I support is targeting funding for summer youth violence prevention programs using Boston Police Department data on violent hot spots. I would also work with officers, the City Council, and the Mayor's office to promote year-round youth job training programs and recruit businesses to participate. I will be able to substantially reduce costs by coordinating the efforts of City Departments in the safety of our neighborhoods.

Andrew Kenneally

According to the BMRB's own research, there has been an overall decline in most categories of crime in the City since 2004, except for drug arrests, which increased by 46%. That said I would like to invest more in prevention. As the former co-founder and director of a non-profit, the West Roxbury Safety Coalition, I spent much our resources on prevention. This means working with community – adults and children alike – to educate them about the dangers of drugs. As a city councilor, I would continue to put money into prevention because as the old adage says, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Ayanna Pressley

In the late 1990s, during strong economic times and because of the great collaborative efforts between the Ten Points Coalition and the Boston Police Department, we made phenomenal strides at improving public safety and reducing violence. When budget crunches started hitting after the good times went away, many of those programs ended and institutional focus waned. It took a few years to fully recognize that unacceptable levels of violence had come back to certain areas. We need to look at those lessons and return to them.

A City Councilor has the power to impact public safety in four ways. Legislatively, we need to look at ways we can improve our laws, improve how we collect statistics, how we determine unit strength. At the bully pulpit, a Councilor must hold hearings to make accountable those responsible for public safety, for good and for bad. In the face of bloodshed, Councilors can take actions to deal with the immediate trauma that is caused by violence, being a conduit of information, helping get counseling for those who need it, and ensuring that anyone who has suffered is helped. And long-term, a Councilor can bring all parties to the table to work on solutions that can be developed through a community building process.