

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

CITY FINANCES

In light of spending reductions implemented this year and expected local aid cuts next year, what steps would you take to ensure continued delivery of basic services within a balanced budget in fiscal 2011? What hard choices will you tackle to achieve greater operational savings next year? How would you apply revenues from the increase in the hotel room excise and new meals excise both this year and next?



Felix Arroyo

I fully supported recent efforts to establish a meals tax and a hotels tax, and continue to work as a City Councilor to diversify our revenue further and ensure that all pay their fare share. I recognize that the City's budget choices will likely be no easier in 2011 and that difficult decisions will need to be made. If I were drafting the budget, I would cut from the overtime budgets for law enforcement and I would reduce the amount the City spends on energy through aggressive conservation and conversion efforts. Ultimately, the 2011 City budget will need to include large spending cuts and/or additional revenue enhancements to avoid involuntary layoffs and retain the most essential City services in every neighborhood. As a City Councilor At-Large, it will be my obligation to ensure that every school, every neighborhood and every Boston resident continues to receive adequate and appropriate City services.

John Connolly

I will continue my work pushing the City to emphasize savings through energy efficient facilities and vehicles. I will continue to push for a better use of technology to deliver more cost effective and efficient city services.

My priorities will remain getting dollars to the classroom, preserving teaching positions, and avoiding any layoffs of sworn police officers. With these goals in mind, I will do my best in making tough decisions during the budget process.

Tomas Gonzalez

In FY 2011 we expect a \$280 M budgetary shortfall. We took an \$80 M cut in local aid in FY 2010, which we made up in local options such as the revenue from the 2% from hotel tax. We currently have negotiated one year wage freezes. That means we need to figure out, quickly, how to live up to the contracts that we are obligated to pay in the next year. Boston relies too much on property taxes. We need to diversify our budget and revenue streams. One way to do this is for city councilors to act more aggressively as ambassadors to grow revenue from the tax on hotel and restaurant business by attracting more conventions and tourists. We can't cut education or public safety, but we can consolidate programs where synergies already exist. We can consolidate outreach in family programs that currently run from schools with community centers, the Public Health Commission, and recreational centers could be combined. Facilities left unused by consolidation could become business development incubators, nonprofit workspace, or artist live/work space, for example.

Tito Jackson

The large fraction of the budget allocated to municipal salaries makes finding operational savings a difficult challenge, particularly given my commitment to ensuring that workers in Boston have great, secure jobs whether they work for the City or for private employers. As an At-Large City Councilor, my first priority in making sustainable budget choices will be to identify innovative opportunities for achieving stated goals at a lower cost. For instance, education spending is a large fraction of the City budget, and all Boston residents want to make sure that our young people learn as much as they can. The one third of Boston residents between the ages of 20 and 34 represent a pool of 200,000 young people who could serve as volunteer mentors for Boston students, helping them to receive a truly first-class public education with limited budget impact.

Two of my other priorities are creating great jobs for great people, and making housing affordable. Housing and Neighborhood Development and Economic Development are allocated 0.4% and 0.1% respectively in the proposed FY2010 budget. To the extent that there are excess revenues available in future budgets, they could be applied to substantially increase allocations to these two areas.

Andrew Kenneally

To survive in this fiscal environment, Boston needs to do several things:

Increasing Revenue

- Ensuring tax exempt institutions, like colleges and universities, pay their fair share for use of our city's services
- Bolstering city loan fund to jumpstart stalled development projects throughout city to put people back to work and create property that generates income for the city

Cutting Costs

- Investing in new technologies like CitiStat and 311 which will allow our city to cut costs while improving efficiency.
- Exploring metro government to pool resources amongst neighboring cities and towns

Ayanna Pressley

We are a long way from the 2011 budget vote. Going into the budget process already decided about cuts would be presumptuous. There are many critical programs and services the city has already cut to the bone, and I am concerned about additional cuts that may look good in the short term, but would have serious long-term costs. Tough choices need to be made, and I hope to be a part of that process. But real lives and livelihoods are at stake.

I do believe that the economy will rebound, and I think the city needs to take a serious look at some short term revenue sources, like the \$30 million in uncollected property taxes and the millions in uncollected fees and fines. Passage of the Green Tickets legislation at the State House will help. I would like to focus on ways that good economic development can spur job growth, property tax growth, and economic growth for the short- and long term. And I would support some intelligent investment in efficiencies, like the recent expansion of single-stream recycling, which required a small initial investment for almost immediate savings on our residential waste collection.