

2025 BMRB/Dorchester Reporter CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1: BACKGROUND/PERSONAL

1. What is your name, age, and neighborhood where you live?

My name is Henry Santana. I'm 29 years old and I currently live in Roxbury.

2. What is your present occupation? Also, please note any past employment that may be relevant to your candidacy.

Currently, I'm serving as an At-Large City Councilor representing all of Boston in City Hall. Before serving on the City Council, I served as field director and then and later as director of operations in Mission Hill and Fenway liaison for Kenzie Bok. I later transitioned to serve as the first-ever director of Civic Organizing under Mayor Wu.

3. Please detail your educational background and achievements.

I graduated from Lasell University in 2019 with a B.A. in History and Political Science. As a first-generation college graduate, earning that diploma was a very proud moment for me. While at Lasell, I was honored to be elected Senior Class President. Those early leadership experiences taught me the importance of community and the importance of uplifting others.

4. Please list some of your affiliations with non-profits, civic associations, and political groups.

AFSCME, GBLC, Local 26, and SEIU 509 are just a few of the organizations that I've aligned myself with throughout my first term and am lucky enough to have received endorsements from. Outside of labor groups, I pride myself on involvement with community organizations such as the MIRA coalition, a group dedicated to informing and protecting our immigrant communities. I've also partnered with DeeDee's Cry, a nonprofit focused on mental health education and resources for the black community.

5. What in your experience to date will most help you to be an effective leader?

Having already served as an At-Large City Councilor for over a year and a half, I am ready to continue this work on day one. Our city is facing real challenges, and now more than ever, we need leaders who can face them directly with cogent leadership.

What I believe makes me an effective leader is the mix of my experience in both government and my background in community organizing. Throughout my career and in my first term on the Council, I have focused on bringing people together and building coalitions that have guided my policy decisions. My values come from lived experience. I started as a camper at the Mission Hill Summer Program and eventually became its Program Director. That journey taught me that when we invest in community, we create the foundation people need to thrive.

I am also a proud product of our public schools and youth programs which gave me the opportunities and support that shaped who I am today. Those experiences continue to drive my

commitment to making sure every young person and every family in Boston has the same chance to succeed.

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

Three accomplishments stand out as particularly meaningful to me. Earlier this month, we codified the Office of Youth Engagement, creating a permanent structure to ensure that young people in Boston have a seat at the table and a direct voice in shaping policies that affect their lives. I am also proud of helping to establish the \$110 million Housing Accelerator Fund in collaboration with the Mayor. This fund serves as a transformative investment that expands access to affordable housing and strengthens our communities. Finally, serving as Chair of the Public Safety Committee, I have worked to maintain Boston's historically low crime rate while implementing thoughtful, community-focused strategies that keep our neighborhoods safe.

7. When not on the campaign trail, how do you relax?

When I'm not on the campaign trail, I love spending time with my dog, Tatum. Whether it's relaxing at home or going on long walks together. I also cherish quality time with my family, especially my mom, dad, sister, and brother. Being with them keeps me grounded and reminds me why I do this work.

Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

1. What is your party affiliation, and how would you characterize your political Ideology?

I am affiliated with the Democrat party. My political ideologies are shaped by the community's needs. I believe that housing and healthcare are human rights. I proudly stand with the LGBTQIA2S+ community. My role is to serve as a conduit for the people. I show up every day as a reflection of the community and their needs.

2. Please name up to three (and at least one) of your political role models?

Please feel free to explain your choices.

Two of my biggest political role models are Jeffrey Sánchez, former State Representative, and Tito Jackson, former Boston City Councilor. I first met them as a 7th and 8th grader at the Tobin K-8 School, and seeing a Latino man and a Black man in those leadership roles was incredibly inspiring to me as a young student. Jeffrey Sánchez later became a mentor when I interned for him, and he's someone I deeply respect and trust. Both showed me the importance of representation and how public service can transform communities.

3. What would you do to increase voter turnout in the city of Boston, especially for local races?

Increasing awareness through direct contact programs with voters. Ensuring that the election is effectively advertised along with registration deadlines, and removing barriers that keep voters

from being able to participate. I'm also in support of increased transportation for voters to and from the polls. Often, physically getting to the polls, specifically for our community members with mobility issues, serves as a roadblock to voting. Massachusetts, being a Same Day Registration state, is a great first step in making it easier to vote. Having voter registration booths at the polls would go a long way in bringing in infrequent and first-time voters.

Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

1. What is your top priority if elected? How would you use your role as a city councillor to help address or accomplish it?

My top priority is youth. I am focused on the next generation because our city's future depends on young people having the opportunities, support, and resources they need to thrive. As the youngest current councilor, I have seen firsthand how investing in our youth creates positive outcomes not just for individuals, but for entire communities. Education and economic development are inextricably linked. By focusing on the needs of young people, we're able to lift up neighborhoods across Boston. Growing up in this city, I personally benefited from mentors, programs, and opportunities that shaped who I am today. I often think about where I might be without that early investment. On the City Council, I have worked to pay that forward. Youth employment has reached record highs, and the city now offers more youth programs and resources than ever before. I will continue to use my role to ensure every young person has access to the tools, support, and opportunities they need to succeed.

2. Is there a specific city agency you see as in need of urgent reform? If so, please explain.

I wouldn't call it urgent reform, but I do believe we need more investment and expansion of the City's Coordinated Response Team that addresses the Mass and Cass crisis. This team plays a critical role in coordinating efforts around homelessness, addiction, and public health, and expanding its capacity and resources would make a real difference for those most in need and for the city as a whole.

3. What is your position on residency requirements, i.e., requiring people hired by the municipal government to live in the city of Boston?

The people who serve our communities should live in our communities. I think that it's perfectly sensible to require this.

4. Do you favor a return to an elected School Committee? Please explain.

Yes. The School Committee, as currently constructed, isn't held accountable to the public in any way. BPS is truly at a breaking point in terms of leadership and oversight. Involving the community, more, not less, will undoubtedly go a long way in increasing representation and better community and education outcomes.

5. Boston is facing a housing shortage that is impacting the affordability of living in the city. Separately, the Wu administration is pursuing zoning reform to spur development in certain areas and wants to see a return of the city's population to 800,000. 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?

I believe that addressing Boston's housing shortage is the most urgent challenge our city faces. Increasing housing supply is essential, but it must be done in a way that protects existing residents and prevents displacement. I support efforts to spur thoughtful development, including zoning reform, as long as growth is paired with strong protections for tenants and investments in affordable housing. My office would prioritize policies like inclusionary zoning, community-driven planning, and funding for affordable housing initiatives to ensure that new development benefits everyone, not just new arrivals. Growth should strengthen neighborhoods, expand opportunity, and keep our communities diverse and vibrant, rather than forcing longtime residents out of their neighborhoods.

6. Do you support the City's current Inclusionary Zoning policy, which was revised in 2023? If not, what changes would you make?

I support the 2023 Inclusionary Zoning revisions because they represented progress in many ways toward housing equity. That being said, I believe now, as I did during the vote, that these changes are a foundation, not a finish line. The current policy requires developers to include affordable units or pay into our Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which is important, but it continues to not meet the scale of Boston's housing crisis.

In my second term, I plan to push for significantly higher affordable housing requirements that actually reflect the demand we're seeing across every neighborhood in our city. Right now, too many developers are choosing to pay fees rather than build the affordable units our residents desperately need, which means we're losing opportunities to create truly mixed-income communities. I want to strengthen enforcement mechanisms so that building affordable housing becomes the standard, not the exception. We also need to better integrate this policy with Mixed-Income Social Housing models that have proven successful in other cities - approaches that combine public investment with long-term sustainability. Most importantly, any changes to our Inclusionary Zoning policy need genuine community input from the people who are dealing with Boston's housing affordability crisis every day.

7. What is your position on rent control?

Rent control deserves serious consideration as part of our fight to keep Boston affordable for everyone. I've met too many families, hard working people, and seniors who've lived in the same apartment for decades, who are now being forced to choose between paying rent and paying for groceries. Rent control can provide real, immediate relief for tenants facing those impossible rent hikes that are pushing people out of neighborhoods they love. At the same time, I know rent control isn't the only solution, especially because, as of right now, it continues to be banned at the state level, something that the council directly has no power over. With that being our current reality, we need a bigger toolkit that includes building more affordable housing, protecting tenants from unfair evictions, and tackling the housing shortage head-on. I'm committed to exploring every option, including rent control, to make sure Boston remains a place where working families can build a life.

8. What is your assessment of the Wu administration's overall performance?

Please offer a letter grade or pass/fail as part of your answer.

I would give the Wu administration a B. Mayor Wu has made meaningful progress on several key priorities for our city, including housing, climate resilience, and investing in youth jobs. Her administration has taken important steps toward addressing Boston's housing crisis through innovative programs and increasing affordable housing options. I also appreciate the focus on expanding opportunities for young people, which aligns with my own top priorities.

That said, there is still significant work to be done, particularly in addressing public health and safety challenges, improving coordination on issues like Mass and Cass, and ensuring transparency in city processes. Overall, the administration is moving in the right direction and I'm looking forward to the work ahead.

9. The August 2024 closure of Carney Hospital left a huge hole in the city's public health sector. What would you do as a city councillor to address this problem, and what is your position on how the Dorchester campus of Carney Hospital should be re-purposed or re-developed?

The closure of Carney Hospital was devastating for our community, and I've been fighting to address this healthcare crisis since day one. I co-sponsored a resolution calling for the Boston Public Health Commission to declare a public health emergency because of Carney's closure. That's how serious this situation is. When you lose a hospital that served thousands of residents, especially in neighborhoods that already face healthcare disparities, you're putting lives at risk.

Moving forward, we need to be aggressive about ensuring healthcare access in these underserved areas. I'm pushing for expanded community health centers, mobile health units, and partnerships with existing hospitals to fill the gaps left by Carney's closure. We also need to hold Steward Health Care accountable for the mess they created and make sure this doesn't happen again with other hospitals. As for the Dorchester campus itself, any redevelopment needs to prioritize the community's needs first. I want to see significant healthcare services maintained on that site, whether through a new medical facility, expanded community health programs, or innovative healthcare delivery models.

10. What are your plans to address traffic congestion, commuter safety and transportation needs? Please discuss bike lanes as part of your answer.

I've been actively working on transportation safety and congestion issues throughout my term. I've co-sponsored multiple hearing orders on traffic safety using traffic calming techniques and the expansion of the Safety Surge program to make our streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Working together with the Boston Walking and City Trails, we've been able to preserve a 27-mile green biking and walking path throughout the city. Along with that, I've supported the expansion of Bluebikes throughout the city, giving access to many more transit options to our thousands of daily MBTA users.

An initiative I'm really proud of was the push for a municipal bus service that would provide last-mile connections and late-night shuttles for people who work non-traditional hours, making it easier for them to get around the city safely. I've also supported efforts to improve sidewalks and create Safe School Zones so kids and families can travel safely in their neighborhoods. When we invest in better public transit, protected bike lanes, and safer streets, we make Boston a city that works for everyone, no matter how they get around.

11. How will you approach the issue of gun violence in our communities?

I view gun violence as both an issue of public safety and public health. This complicated issue requires truly community-directed solutions. Bringing together everyone who touches this issue: police, community organizations, schools, hospitals, and most importantly, residents themselves, is the way to address it. I've called for hearings that examine how we can better connect these different groups because too often, they're working in silos when they should be working together. When a young person is at risk, they need wraparound services that include mentorship, job training, educational opportunities, and mental health support all at once.

I support using hospitals as intervention points since that's often where victims of violence first get help, and it's a critical moment to break cycles of revenge. I also believe in violence interruption programs that use community members who have credibility on the streets to mediate conflicts before they escalate. At the end of the day, we can't arrest our way out of gun

violence. We have to invest in our communities, create real opportunities for our young people, and build networks of support that make violence unnecessary.

12. How would you confront the drug epidemic, safety, and sanitation issues affecting residents near Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard?

As the Chair of the Public Safety Committee, this is an issue that's top of mind when trying to address safety concerns throughout the city. Having more resources and support for those in the throes of addiction, including somewhere safe and inside where they can sleep at night, is a top priority. I also recognize that residents and businesses in the area deserve safe, clean streets. That's why I support immediate interventions for sanitation, needle cleanup, and public safety while we build the long-term infrastructure for treatment and housing.

13. According to DESE's most recent data, 40.4% of Boston's public schools were classified as 'requiring assistance or intervention. In June 2022, Boston Public Schools entered into an agreement with the state to make improvements to the state of the Boston Public Schools. As the agreement expired in June, how would you work to ensure continued accountability for the City's schools, close achievement gaps and ensure that all BPS students receive a quality education?

As the Chair of the Education Committee, this issue has guided my response and approach on the committee and my legislative priorities. Every BPS student deserves a quality education. The expiration of the state agreement doesn't mean accountability ends. Now we need to be even more proactive at the local level. I've pushed for hearings on financial literacy programs and the expansion of bilingual education programs can begin to fill these achievement gaps in other ways. Knowledge is power, and arming our students with the skills needed to succeed goes a long way in expanding achievement.

I believe in transparency and community engagement in school improvement. I've called for hearings that bring together school leadership, teachers, parents, and students to have honest conversations about what's working and what isn't. The 40% figure is truly unacceptable, but it's also a call to action. We need continued oversight, increased funding for the schools that need it most, and policies that address the root causes of educational inequity.

14. 81.6% of BPS students are classified as high needs, compared to 55.8% at the state level. Do you believe that BPS is adequately serving high needs students, including English language learners and special education students, and if not, what can be done to improve their approach?

The needs of our English language learners and students with IEPs are often not fully addressed, and policy alone is not enough to fill the gaps. I've co-sponsored hearings specifically focused

on how Boston Public Schools can expand the use of evidence-based best practices for Inclusive Learning Environments for multilingual and special education learners to allow students with specialized needs to be better understood and then better addressed.

One of the biggest gaps I see is in paraprofessional support. These students often need one-on-one or small group assistance to succeed, but we don't have nearly enough qualified paraprofessionals in our classrooms. Along with more in-classroom support, we also need better transition planning to help these students move successfully from grade to grade and eventually into post-secondary education or employment.

15. Most of Boston's revenues come from property taxes, and robust new growth in recent years has enabled substantial budgetary increases, an average of 5.4% over the last decade. However, new growth in FY25 was \$90.5M, 25.7% less than FY24, and a slowdown in new construction in the city may impact future proceeds from the new growth that drives the City's budget.

The decline in new growth revenue does signal a concern that will require us to be proactive about our city's spending. This reduction in growth will directly affect our ability to fund the programs and services people across the city rely on every day. I've previously proposed a review of Boston's Employment Commission to better understand how to maintain a consistent tax base. We need local hiring requirements that put money back into our communities and support homeownership among working families.

The slowdown in construction means we need to diversify our revenue streams and be smarter about development incentives. I've supported work on reforming our PILOT program; we can't rely solely on property tax growth when that growth is slowing. I've also been examining how we can better capture value from existing developments through things like linkage fees and inclusionary zoning requirements.