

2025 BMRB/Dorchester Reporter CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1: BACKGROUND/PERSONAL

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

My name is Ruthzee Louijeune. I am 39 years old, and I live in Hyde Park.

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

I am currently a City Councilor At-Large and the City Council President. I am also an attorney, where I represented families facing eviction and foreclosure, worked in private practice representing a variety of clients, and participated in cases before the Supreme Court expanding voting rights. I served as the senior attorney on Senator Warren's presidential and Senate campaigns.

3. Please detail your educational background and achievements.

I am a proud graduate of Boston Public Schools, where I attended the Charles H. Taylor Elementary School in Mattapan, John W. McCormack Middle School in Dorchester, and Boston Latin School in the Longwood/Medical area. I attended Columbia University, Harvard Law School, and Harvard Kennedy School.

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

I am a member of the Civic Action Project (board member), Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association (member), Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance (member), and the Warren Alumni Network.

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

I am qualified to hold office because of my commitment to Boston, the diverse communities I represent, and my ability to solve the issues that working class Bostonians are facing. I am motivated to do the work, I love doing the work, and I love listening and bringing people together. I am deeply rooted in my community and this city. I champion a vision for Boston that is inclusive, affordable, equitable, and fun.

I've represented tenants and homeowners facing displacement in Boston Housing Court. I ran a weekly eviction clinic to help tenants without legal representation complete paperwork to preserve their legal rights. I've worked on an education committee in City Hall under Mayor Menino to improve education outcomes for all our students. I worked as the Senior Counsel for Senator

Warren's presidential and Senate campaigns advocating for progressive values, and I've been a member, activist, and attorney with community groups to solve the city's systemic issues of affordable housing, homeownership, and food insecurity.

In my first two terms as a City Councilor At-Large, I have focused on making Boston more just and equitable. I have won millions of dollars in city vouchers and housing support, fought for and won increased legal assistance for grassroots immigrant rights organizations, and addressed issues like pest control and waste management. I have also advocated for housing reforms, secured investments in school counselors, and advocated for educators across the city. I stay embedded in my community, participating in events and meeting directly with residents to learn about the issues impacting them. I helped create a relief program for small businesses, led legislation to bring liquor licenses to Nubian Square and co-sponsored legislation to bring more liquor licenses to our neighborhoods.

At the start of my second term, I was unanimously elected President of the Boston City Council. As Council President, my leadership is fair, collaborative, and accessible. I strive to find common ground and foster understanding. During my first term, I successfully led the council through the contentious redistricting process. I am trilingual (English, Haitian Creole, French) and conversant in Spanish, which makes me more accessible to Bostonians. I am proud to be the first Haitian-American elected in the Boston municipal government and plan to continue to support and uplift the needs of my community.

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

1. Advanced affordable housing by 1) investing in expanding housing vouchers through budget amendments and hearings, and 2) working on legislation to prioritize affordable housing on sites of former municipal buildings. I've also engaged in state and federal advocacy to secure additional resources, recognizing that tackling Boston's housing crisis requires a regional approach and action at every level of government.
2. Taking a hands-on approach to addressing trash collection and rodent control by working directly with constituents, introducing budget amendments to expand funding, and supporting innovative pilot programs like rat birth control. I've participated in "rat walks," held countless meetings with city workers to understand neighborhood-specific

challenges, and diligently worked the other side of the coin, responsible trash management, knowing both are essential to cleaner, safer streets.

3. Strengthening Boston's commitment to racial justice and civil rights by reaffirming the Trust Act, making clear the boundaries between the work of our Boston Police Department and federal officials, and ensuring immigrant communities can engage with local government without fear.

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

I like to get outside, biking, hiking, or scooting along Jamaicaway, in the Blue Hills, along the Neponset River Trail, or through the Southwest Corridor Park. I'm a big concert-goer, as music brings me a lot of joy. And I love trying new restaurants with my girlfriends (but really just going to our favorite haunts over and over again!). I also have a big family, and I love hanging out with them.

Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

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

I am a Democrat, and I am focused on creating a more just and equitable city rooted in progressive values of shared prosperity. I know and understand the issues facing our residents, and I strive to address them while bridging gaps and increasing resources for all Bostonians.

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

Robert Louijeune, my father, is one of my political role models. He is a model for what it means to show up for and be in community, and to care deeply about your neighbor.

Oftentimes you can't be what you can't see. I had the privilege of interning for Marie St. Fleur at the State House when she was a representative. Needless to say, seeing a Haitian-American woman stand up for our community had an incredible impact on me.

Karilyn Crockett gave me my first job as a walking tour guide at MYTOWN. This exposed me to the city's rich and diverse city and gave me a sense of ownership over solving the city's problems. It taught me the most important power is everyday people power through broad cross-class & cross-racial coalitions.

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

We can and should do more to boost voter turnout, especially in our local elections where decisions often have the most direct impact on people's lives. Boston should invest in year-round civic engagement and public awareness campaigns. Removing barriers matters too, which is why I support same-day voter registration and stronger language access so every eligible resident can fully participate.

I'm also a strong supporter of ranked choice voting, which fosters broader engagement and reduces polarization by giving voters more meaningful choices. I recently helped shepherd a ranked choice voting home rule petition through the City Council. We should also explore more ways of expanding the franchise so more residents can have a say in local decisions that shape our shared future.

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?

If re-elected, housing will remain my top priority. The cost of living in Boston is simply too high, and we need both immediate relief and long-term solutions. That means expanding rental voucher programs and creating more affordable homeownership opportunities that match what residents can actually afford. It also means closing the racial wealth gap by supporting first-generation homeownership grant programs targeted to communities that have faced historic discrimination, such as blockbusting and redlining.

We should make greater use of public land and buildings for affordable housing

and homeownership development, ensuring these projects are built with community stability in mind. I recently sponsored an ordinance to prioritize turning vacant municipal buildings into affordable housing, a practical step that could address both the housing crises and revitalize unused spaces. I would continue to use my role to push for policies that keep people in Boston and give working families a real path to stability and opportunity.

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

The Inspectional Services Department (ISD) is in need of healthy reform. Residents and business owners alike often face delays, inconsistent communication, and unclear processes when trying to navigate inspections, permitting, or code enforcement. A more transparent, customer-focused approach, paired with better use of technology, could make ISD more efficient and accessible. Streamlining timelines, improving follow-up, and ensuring consistent application of rules would also help build public trust and make it easier for residents and businesses to work with the City.

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

I support Boston's residency requirements and the goals of such policies like the Boston Residents Jobs Policy (BRJP), which helps ensure that the people serving our city are also part of its communities. Enforcing this policy is important for building a municipal workforce that reflects Boston's diversity, keeps taxpayer dollars in the local economy, and strengthens the connection between city employees and the neighborhoods they serve.

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

Yes. I support returning to an elected School Committee because it strengthens accountability and gives residents a direct voice in who is shaping education policy. Boston is one of the few municipalities in Massachusetts without an elected committee, and I believe our families and communities should have that say. I'm open to either a fully elected model or a hybrid approach that blends elected and appointed members, as long as it ensures transparency, responsiveness, and broad representation.

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?

Growing Boston's population to 800,000 is an ambitious goal, but it only works if we pair new development with strong protections against displacement. Expanding affordable housing must go hand-in-hand with keeping current residents in their homes. I support using City-owned land and buildings for deeply affordable and mixed-income housing, scaling up the Office to Residential Conversion Program, and advocating for a real estate transfer fee to help fund new affordable units.

We also need stronger direct protections: right to counsel, eviction prevention measures, and a tenant opportunity to purchase program that gives residents a fair chance to stay in their homes. I've held a hearing on one of Boston's most successful ventures, the Acquisition Opportunity Program to safeguard affordable, accessible units, and I believe those tenant voices should be central in shaping future policy. The goal is not just to grow the city, but to ensure that growth strengthens communities.

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

Yes. I supported the 2023 revisions to Boston's Inclusionary Development Policy and have long believed it should do more to create affordable housing. In 2022, I introduced a resolution affirming and strengthening our inclusionary zoning. I also remain committed to working with tenant groups, developers, and community members to find balanced ways to deepen affordability while supporting thoughtful growth in our neighborhoods.

7. What is your position on rent control?

I support rent stabilization and back the proposal passed by the City Council that is now before Beacon Hill. The goal is to create a more predictable, balanced housing market—one that gives tenants greater security while providing landlords with clear, stable rules. This approach won't solve Boston's housing challenges on its own, but it is an important tool to help keep people in their homes and reduce the volatility that drives displacement.

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 brought energy, vision, and a willingness to tackle complex structural issues, from climate resilience to housing policy. Her administration has made progress on long-term priorities. Overall, she is doing a good job, and my hope is the next phase of her leadership will balance big-picture initiatives with a sharper, more consistent focus on the day-to-day needs of Boston's communities.

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?

In the wake of Carney's closure, Boston needs to approach the site with two guiding principles: protect the public's health and preserve the community's sense of stability. I believe the Dorchester campus should remain centered on health care, whether that means a full-service hospital, a network of urgent care and specialty services, or a health and wellness hub that integrates mental health, primary care, and preventative medicine. There is also room for some housing, done thoughtfully. The goal is not just to fill a building, but to restore the essential services and trust it once embodied.

This will require collaboration between the city, the state, health care providers, and the community itself. If done right, the redevelopment of the Carney site can serve as a statement about the kind of city we want to be, one that does not abandon its neighborhoods when they need us most. This is why when pharmacies began to close in some of our most vulnerable neighborhoods I filed a petition to extend the closure notice period to give our residents adequate notice. I continue to support all options that give our residents more health care options, not less.

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

We need a transportation system that is safe, accessible, and equitable for everyone, whether they travel by train, bus, bike, scooter, wheelchair, or on foot. That starts with making the MBTA more reliable and expanding service, including true late-night service that meets the needs of 2nd and 3rd shift workers. We should invest in shared bus lanes and other infrastructure that speeds up service, while redesigning streets to safely accommodate all modes of transportation, particularly in neighborhoods with limited transit access. Protected bike lanes are an important part of that vision. When placed thoughtfully, they make cycling safer and more appealing while reducing conflict between drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. Low and Fare-free buses should become a permanent feature in Boston, as these changes, combined with targeted infrastructure investments, can help ease congestion, improve commuter safety, and make our streets work better for everyone.

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

I would approach gun violence as both a public safety issue and a public health crisis, addressing its immediate dangers while tackling its root causes. That begins with supporting nonprofit organizations in specific areas, particularly those led by residents or people with lived experience in the criminal and justice system, who are already doing the on-the-ground work. We need to continue the collection and analysis of gun violence data to target our resources effectively, and we should focus on closing loopholes and codifying recent federal rule changes into Massachusetts law to stem the flow of illegal guns into our neighborhoods.

Healing from gun violence requires more than enforcement. We must expand access to justice healing circles, mental health services, and trauma-informed care, while continuing to invest in the basics: stable housing, good jobs, food security, health care, and quality education.

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

The crisis at Mass & Cass is driven by addiction, housing instability, and mental health challenges, and its scale has outstripped the City's current capacity. We need a holistic strategy that keeps recovery and housing at its core. Without stable housing paired with essential services, it's nearly impossible for people to focus on treatment, medical care, or detox. The City's programs that combine

housing with wraparound supports have shown real promise, and we should build on that approach in partnership with the community and health care providers.

This is a regional problem that Boston cannot shoulder alone. It requires sustained state investment and active participation from the health care and services communities. Reopening Long Island as a dedicated treatment and recovery campus must be part of the long-term solution, and I have advocated to both state and federal agencies for the funding to make it a reality. With stable housing, coordinated services, and shared responsibility, we can respond to this crisis with the seriousness it demands.

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?

I believe Boston must hold itself to a high standard of accountability for our public schools, even without a formal state agreement in place. That means making sure every school has the essential resources to serve students well. I have pushed to expand access to guidance counselors and social workers, especially in schools serving primarily Black and Brown students, where support is often lacking. Meeting students' social and emotional needs is inseparable from improving their academic outcomes.

We should also think about the way we talk about schools, also focusing on their strengths and successes rather than defining them solely by deficits. Elevating what's working helps build a culture of improvement rather than resignation. I support moving to a fully elected school committee so accountability rests directly with the public.

We can and should continue to make strategic investments: reducing class sizes, hiring more counselors, and improving training for school leaders to reduce turnover. Expanding universal pre-K is critical for early learning, and every school, especially elementary schools, should have a library. Partnering with local libraries can help foster a lifelong love of reading.

Our school buildings are also in need of serious investment, and I have filed a hearing order to investigate if a Boston School Building Authority would work in Boston like it has in other major cities.

Finally, we must improve services for students with disabilities and ensure they are not concentrated in a small number of schools. Expanding PILOT schools and programs can also give educators more flexibility to try new approaches that meet the diverse needs of our students.

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?

I do not believe BPS is adequately serving high needs students. In too many schools, the basic supports simply aren't there, yet some, like Young Achievers, don't have a single guidance counselor on site. I've filed legislation to increase the number of school counselors and to set minimum building standards so every school has the staffing and resources needed for academic and social success.

Supporting English language learners must be a central priority. I co-sponsored a hearing order to address the needs of parents of English language learner students and ensure they have clear, accessible information to help their children thrive. Access to universal pre-K should be straightforward for all families, particularly ELL households, and we should expand proven inclusive models like the Haitian Creole–English dual language program at Mattahunt Elementary. Research consistently shows that dual language programs help ELL students succeed.

We also need targeted academic recovery. High-dosage tutoring has been effective in other districts at closing gaps in math, reading, and writing through intensive, personalized instruction. It's an approach worth scaling here. Our focus should remain on evidence-based strategies that deliver the core services students need, especially in communities where those supports have been lacking for far too long.

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.

How will you approach these budget challenges and balance the needs of residents and commercial property owners?

Boston's budget challenges require both discipline and creativity. I support the City's home rule petition to shift some of the property tax burden from residential to commercial owners, which can help temper sharp increases for homeowners. Seniors, in particular, should have more access to property tax assistance and exemptions, and the city should do more to publicize these programs.

While Boston can't expand its taxing authority without state approval, it can be more intentional about the revenue tools it does have. That means looking at fees on Transportation Network Companies like Uber, strengthening the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program by tying contributions to recent property assessments, and seeking public-private partnerships that provide direct benefits, such as free college courses or summer jobs for Boston Public School students. A real estate transfer fee on high-value properties could also provide another important stream of funding, and the city should continue to work to identify other fees that fall within and outside of its constrained legal authority. This approach would blend fairness with pragmatism, ensuring we protect residents while keeping Boston on stable financial footing.

Thank you for participating in the Boston Municipal Research Bureau/Dorchester Reporter questionnaire. Please send the completed document as a PDF or WordDoc to dhalky@bmrp.org by Friday, Aug. 15, 2025.