

2025 BMRB/Dorchester Reporter CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1: BACKGROUND/PERSONAL

1. What is your name, age, and neighborhood where you live?
Will Onuoha; 42 years old; Grew up on Mission Hill and currently live in Dorchester
2. What is your present occupation? Also, please note any past employment that may be relevant to your candidacy.
 - Currently Assistant General Counsel & Director of Health & Safety at the Boston Water and Sewer Commission
 - Past Executive Director of the City of Boston's Office of Fair Housing, Equity & Civil Rights
 - Past Deputy Commissioner/Director of Housing at Boston's Inspectional Services Department
 - Past Executive Director of My Brother's Keeper & Creator of Human Rights Commission
 - Past Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services Coordinator for Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Mission Hill, and Fenway under Mayor Menino
3. Please detail your educational background and achievements.
 - Graduate of Snowden International Academy, UMass-Amherst, and New England School of Law
4. Please list some of your affiliations with non-profits, civic associations, and political groups.
 - NAACP
 - LLEGO/Boston
 - Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. (Iota Chi Chapter)
 - YMCA Board Member/ Huntington Ave
5. What in your experience to date will most help you to be an effective leader?
I have 20 years of experience in City government that ranges from running City departments to performing constituent services. There is no other candidate with my level of experience in City government and no one who has served in the last four mayoral administrations. I have been on the frontline of every major issue facing Boston in the past two decades which will allow me to be the most effective advocate for Bostonians.

I believe that housing affordability is the biggest challenge facing Boston, and I have extensive experience creating and implementing policy that creates affordable/workforce housing.
6. What are the three accomplishments you're most proud of?
 - Graduating law school;
 - Co-authoring the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Report for the City of Boston that made Boston a national model for the Biden/Harris Administration;

• Making the Fair Housing Office the top performing Fair Housing program in the Northeast Region for HUD;

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

I am passionate about reading and fitness. I enjoy history, doing mixed martial arts, and I am an aspiring wine/cigar aficionado.

Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

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

I am unenrolled and would consider myself to be politically moderate.

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

• Tom Menino – Mayor Menino means everything to me. He was like a second father and first got me involved in public service. He was also the person who told me, “Kid, you’ve got to go to law school.” Mayor Menino was a true public servant and a guardian of the City of Boston for all people.

• Deval Patrick

• Former HUD Commissioner Julián Castro

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

It is heartbreaking that 100,000+ more people turn out to vote for President in Boston than for Mayor, when the mayor arguably has more of a direct impact on our lives. I support making permanent universal early voting by mail (mailing ballot applications to every registered voter) and being out in the community more. I would also prioritize going into our schools to teach our youth about the importance of civic involvement and voting.

People need to know and be able to access their elected officials. Most voters I meet when knocking doors cannot name their At-Large City Councilors. I wonder if that is the fault of the voter or if many At-Large City Councilors aren’t out in the community.

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?

Access to housing that Bostonians can afford. Everyone deserves an affordable, stable place to call home. A housing affordability crisis – marked by skyrocketing housing costs, gentrification, and displacement – threatens that fundamental right for too many residents. We need strong leadership to ensure Boston remains a city where everyone can live and thrive, not just the wealthy few.

I am a housing professional, having run the Office of Fair Housing & Civil Rights under Mayor Walsh, serving as Commissioner of Housing at the Boston Inspectional Services Department (ISD), and being engaged in the planning, housing, and development processes at City Hall for over 15 years. I have seen what works and what doesn't, and I am ready to bring this experience to the City Council.

To create more affordable housing for low-income and middle-income earners in Boston, the city must expand inclusionary zoning policies, incentivize developers to build affordable/workforce units, and repurpose underutilized public land. Strengthening partnerships with non-profit housing organizations and community land trusts can also ensure long-term affordability. Streamlining permitting processes and offering tax credits can reduce construction costs and encourage investment. I will advocate for the creation an abundance package that will cut red tape and expedite the development of workforce housing. Additionally, preserving existing affordable units can help prevent displacement. Engaging local neighborhoods in planning and decision-making ensures developments meet residents' needs while promoting equitable growth. These strategies together can address Boston's housing crisis and improve stability for low and middle-income households.

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

The Inspectional Services Department (ISD) needs to be reformed and modernized to handle the volume of work it takes to permit, oversee, and aid the City in some of its most important functions. By strategically investing in adding positions like plans examiners, technology systems that are connected to other City departments, and streamlining permitting, we can enhance Boston's economy, support small businesses, and provide better City services to residents.

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 believe that City of Boston employees living in Boston strengthens our communities. They are deeply engaged in the success of the city and play an outsized role in community engagement, as civic association members, youth sports coaches, volunteers for non-profits and community-based organizations and so much more.

That being said, Boston is in a housing crisis that has increasingly made it more difficult for City workers to afford to buy a home here, so I would be open to conversations on this issue.

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

I support a hybrid School Committee. Bostonians should have greater input on the School Committee (which is why certain members should be elected), however, a fully elected School Committee could result in the over-politicization of education policy, harming the interests of children and families. Additionally, it is important that subject area experts serve on the School Committee, something a partially appointed committee allows for.

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?

The creation of housing that Bostonians can afford is one of my top priorities for the City Council. While I think the target is right, I am frustrated that Boston is coming up short in the execution. The last two quarters, Boston has been below benchmark in the permitting and development of housing units.

If we are serious about housing creation, we need work with the business community and construction industry to spur growth during the economic challenges being caused by high interest rates and a lack of predictability for those looking to build housing in Boston.

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

The City of Boston must ensure that it is setting policy that maximizes the creation of units that are affordable to Boston residents. As we seek to create more affordable housing in Boston, we must include all stakeholders to ensure production is being maximized. In listening to industry experts, we must be nimble and open to flexibility on Inclusionary Zoning during the current economic downturn and doubling down on the incentivization of housing creation. In this economic climate, the 20% policy is preventing housing creation. Twenty percent of nothing is nothing. I am more interested in practical policymaking that results in housing creation, not political stances that sound good, but actually inhibit the goal of housing production.

As City Councilor, I will work closely with all involved parties to expand affordability in Boston.

7. What is your position on rent control?

The high cost of housing in Boston remains the greatest challenge our city faces. Seniors are being forced out of the communities they helped build. Young people are unable to afford skyrocketing rents and attain homeownership. Meanwhile, it has become too expensive for many families to raise children in Boston. Rent control and rent stabilization can take many forms. In its current definition, I do not support it due to concerns over impacts on mom and pop property owners and examples of other cities where a well-intentioned policy resulted in reduced housing stock and blighted neighborhoods. As policymakers, we must carefully analyze the benefits and unintended consequences of any sweeping policy change. First and foremost, we must begin with incentivizing the creation of more housing units that Bostonians can afford, activating vacant lots, and using planning to increase workforce housing.

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.

One common concern I hear is that residents do not feel like they have a voice or are part of the decision making that happens at City Hall. I think the City has failed to address major challenges like the crisis at Mass & Cass, the widespread creation of underutilized bike lanes, proposing moving the O'Bryant High School to West Roxbury, and Boston kids still not being able to access high-quality schools.

I think the City has done a great job reducing violent crime, promoting environmental sustainability, and investing in parks, playgrounds, open space, and cultural events.

I believe the City Council needs to be more independent to call out the City's shortcomings and work to fix them, not be a rubber stamp for the Executive Branch. That benefits no one.

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 a huge blow to Dorchester and its surrounding communities. The racial and wealth-based health inequities that exist are staggering, and Carney's closure will only exacerbate them. I believe that redevelopment should prioritize health care uses and patient care. As City Councilor, I will support the work of the Dorchester Health Planning Working Group to ensure that health care needs are met (or temporarily mitigated). Additionally, I will advocate for increased funding for community health centers and other forms of care that can attempt to fill this coverage gap for our neighbors.

I will also work closely with residents and community stakeholders to explore the possibility of mixed-use healthcare/workforce/senior housing.

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

Boston has some of the worst traffic congestion in the country. As policymakers, we must focus on solutions that are successful and do not have adverse impacts on our neighborhoods. Transportation policy must acknowledge the diversity of Boston's neighborhoods and population. For example, the transit needs for a senior in Mattapan buying groceries is far different than a 24-year old in Allston going out to dinner. Similarly, a parent with a toddler travels differently than someone without children.

Specific to bike lanes, I would immediately halt all new bike lane construction in Boston. Bike infrastructure is important, but we must also acknowledge that many streets in Boston are not suitable for bike lanes. I, like so many others, have heard frustration over tens of millions of dollars being spent on bike lanes that are underutilized and actually worsen traffic congestion.

I have a detailed 9-point transportation plan to improve transit in Boston, that includes:

1. Halting the construction all new bike lane construction in Boston.
2. Stop the creation of a center bus lane on Blue Hill Avenue.
3. Demand significantly greater enforcement for delivery drivers on scooters, e-bikes, and motorcycles.
4. Dispatch traffic enforcement units of the Boston Police Department to direct traffic at our busiest intersections during rush hour traffic.
5. Pilot flashing light crosswalk technology.
6. Advocate for a BPS assignment and transportation system that works.
7. Restrict tour buses during peak rush hour.
8. Target UBER and Lyft scofflaw drivers.
9. Encourage cross-agency collaboration to make public transit safer.

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

I grew up in Mission Hill in the 1980s, so I understand what it is like to live in a neighborhood that isn't safe. Having closely studied the success of the Boston Miracle, I embrace a comprehensive approach to tackling gun violence – bringing together law enforcement, social workers, community-based organizations, faith communities, BPS, after-school programming, our courts, and trusted voices on our streets to identify and intervene with our at-risk youth before they become involved with violence.

Specific to guns, I supported the passage of gun safety measures to outlaw ghost guns and "Glock Switches", getting dangerous weapons off our streets.

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

Boston has failed residents of the South End and Lower Roxbury on the public safety and public health crisis at Mass & Cass. Drug use, violence, discarded needles, and human waste endanger neighbors daily.

Meanwhile, instead of trying to fix the problem, a Boston City Councilor used a procedural measure to block a resolution to declare a 'State of Emergency' at Mass & Cass – something I strongly supported. It is time to acknowledge the failure and work towards solutions for both the short- and long-term.

I will demand increased levels of enforcement (including a dedicated bike patrol unit), listen to and work with residents and community stakeholders, explore the use of Mercy ships while Long Island is being reactivated, and demand increased responsiveness from the City of Boston. People must not be allowed to use narcotics freely on City streets and better coordination with the District Attorney's office and our courts can get treatment for people suffering from addiction, incarcerate those who prey on our most vulnerable, and restore the rule of law in the surrounding communities.

12. 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?

Despite having the highest per pupil expenditure rate out of any major American city, Boston consistently comes up short in providing our children with a high-quality education. I am a BPS graduate, and my wife is a BPS teacher, so I have seen the incredible quality of education that many kids receive, but also know that many schools fail our children.

I will push for equitable funding for BPS, ensuring all students have access to quality education and resources. This includes advocating for better classroom materials, improved school facilities, high-dosage tutoring, and additional support services like after-school programs and special education services and championing local partnerships that provide youth development programs.

We also need to have a City Council that cares about the Boston Public Schools. The current Education Committee chair has broken from past chairs and rarely holds hearings. We must be unafraid to identify shortcomings in BPS and work to fix them. Maintaining the status quo only hurts our children.

13. 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?

No. We need more wraparound services for our highest-need students. Over 5,000 of these children suffer from housing instability or homelessness, requiring additional services from BPS.

I am deeply concerned how Federal education cuts are going specifically impact these areas. As previously stated, more resources need to be directed to student services and into the classroom rather than more administration in the BPS Central Office.

As City Councilor, I will also regularly meet with parents, the Boston Public Schools' Special Education Parent Advisory Council, and leaders in various language communities to ensure their voices are heard.

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?

The most important statutory responsibility of the Boston City Council is reviewing, providing oversight, and approving the annual City budget. With residential taxpayers bearing the brunt of the City's tax structure, we must always be fiscally responsible, embracing programs and services that work, and unafraid to cut those that do not.

Amidst the uncertainty surrounding Federal funding cuts, plummeting commercial real estate values, and a construction standstill, we must be more vigilant and fiscally prudent than ever before.

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.