



Campaign for Parks 2021 Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: John Barros

(former Chief of Economic Development, City of Boston)

1. What Boston park or open space do you visit most often?

I feel so lucky to live in a city where every resident is within a 10 minute walk to a park. Boston has so many parks and open spaces to choose from when I want to get outside to enjoy the weather, spend time with my children, or explore another neighborhood. Nellie Miranda Memorial Park is just a short walk from my home with a great jungle gym for my four children. The Clifford Playground is just around the corner from their school, so we have spent many mornings and afternoons on the slides. But there's no park in my mind that tops Franklin Park, the crown jewel of the Emerald Necklace. As a family we try to get out there and explore and ride our bikes, and my children are huge fans of the Franklin Park Zoo. The Kite and Bike Festival is an annual tradition for us. As Chief of Economic Development for seven years, I was proud to help design the agreement of the sale of the Winthrop Street Garage to make sure \$28 million of the sale would go directly to the revitalization, maintenance, and action plan for Franklin Park. As Boston's largest urban park that connects five different neighborhoods, it's critical to make sure the hundreds of acres are ADA accessible, safe, and resilient to climate change.

2. Do you have a connection to a community garden? Which one?

As Director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and Dudley Neighbors, Inc. (DNI), I led the effort to acquire over half of the 1,300 vacant lots in the neighborhood and convert them into 36 acres into 225 homes, gardens, parks, playgrounds, schools, a community center, and a greenhouse. Under my leadership, DNI established itself as the largest urban community land trust in the country. I'm still closely connected and active with the DSNi community, and am so proud of Dudley Grows and the community gardens built on two city-owned vacant parcels, now managed by resident leaders. With partnership from Alternatives for Community and Environment, we were able to create a holistic and sustainable food and garden landscape for residents through the community

gardens, greenhouses, and markets, and create life-sustaining jobs for local residents.

3. What park-related goals would your administration set to support your vision of a healthy, resilient, and beautiful City?

As Chief of Economic Development, I saw how parks and green spaces strengthen our economy and quality of life, and strongly encouraged these investments. By improving walkability, recreational opportunities, and quality of life, we can attract more employers to the city, and encourage our workforce to stay in our communities.

In 2018, we announced a major coastal resilience program called Resilient Boston Harbor. It's a system not of barricades, but of parks, beaches, trails, and open spaces that are elevated to block floods and enhanced to create opportunity and connection. It calls for 67 acres of new open space and 122 acres of revitalized open space on our waterfront. It will protect our neighborhoods when storms hit, improve quality of life all year long, and ensure that the waterfront and coast are accessible to residents of all neighborhoods.

Investing in climate resilience now is the single greatest investment we can make in the long term health and safety of our neighborhoods. I will focus especially on areas and neighborhoods with the highest concentration of people of color, immigrant communities, people with disabilities, seniors, and low-income households. These communities are at the greatest risk from climate impacts, and stand to benefit the most from resilience efforts which often simultaneously improve quality of life. I plan to accelerate the renovation of Moakley Park, which stands between the ocean and a diverse neighborhood with thousands of units of public and affordable housing. This will protect residents from the increasingly frequent floods, and improve public health and quality of life because of more quality green space, athletic facilities, and public gathering places.

I would also call on employers and building owners to create more green roofs and publicly accessible parks on their roofs. I would create incentives to encourage employers and building owners to do this, and offer assistance through City departments.

As mayor, I will continue these investments in Boston's parks and green spaces, improving quality of life in all our city's neighborhoods.

4. How will you increase access to parks and open space in our residential neighborhoods?

No loss of park space would occur on my watch as Mayor. Our parks are precious to us, and I would work to expand publicly accessible green space. This includes converting publicly-owned vacant lots into a combination of affordable housing and public park space and playing fields. I was proud to be part of the

Walsh Administration, and work with creative leaders in the Parks Department, Neighborhood Development, the Conservation Commission, and the BPDA to acquire the two Walter Street parcels in Roslindale to make sure we could expand the vital Roslindale Wetlands Urban Wild while also building much-needed, new net-zero affordable housing. I would continue the historic investments we made in the Walsh administration in Franklin Park, Boston Common, and in making our waterfront more accessible to the public by creating more park space and holding developers accountable.

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5. Equity has important implications for every aspect of city life. How would you define equity with respect to the city's parks and greenspaces?

During my time leading the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, the Dudley community was predominantly home to lower-income families and families of color, and we faced a severe lack of access to quality green space. I knew that improving access to quality green space would improve people's physical and mental health, as well as counteract the pollution that our community was suffering from. Creating these parks absolutely made the community a healthier place, and throughout my work in the Dudley area and as a Citywide leader, I have worked to expand parks access as a central strategy for promoting public health and wellbeing.

Creating and preserving park space has also been a big focus of my work with Mayor Walsh. In 2018, we hit a major milestone for equitable park access. We became the second city in the United States where every resident lives within a 10-minute walk of a park. We have invested more in our parks system than at any time in Boston's history, including \$28 million in improvements to Boston Common and another \$28 million for Franklin Park. Our parks and green space are central to our climate mitigation and adaptation goals, our quality of life goals, and our health equity goals.

6. The current Boston Parks Dept operating budget is 0.75% of the city operating budget. Would you commit to raising it to 1%?

On a per capita basis Boston spends between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of what Seattle and San Francisco spend on parks. How can Boston increase the pie so that a substantial increase in the park budget will not come at the expense of other vital city services?

As I referenced in Question 5, while I served in the Walsh administration, we invested more in Boston's park system than at any time in the city's history.

During my time as Chief of Economic Development, we budgeted 10% of the city's capital budget to resilience projects. These resilience projects include creating parks and green space to protect vulnerable Boston neighborhoods from flooding, a potentially devastating impact of climate change.

As mayor, I will dedicate 20 percent of the City of Boston's Capital Budget to climate resilience projects. However, that will not be nearly enough funding to address my administration's ambitious goals. So I will also make sure developers are contributing to district-scale sustainability and resilience projects, issue more Green Bonds, pursue funding opportunities with the Federal and State government and philanthropy, and explore new approaches to funding to increase Park maintenance, accessibility, and programming.