



Campaign for Parks 2021 Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: At-large Boston City Councilor Annissa Essabai-George

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

As the softball coach at East Boston High School, I spent a great deal of time at City Yards Field in East Boston. I have some incredible memories from our time practicing and playing on that field.

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

In my role as City Councilor, I had the opportunity to visit many of the city's community gardens. Each one was a testament to that neighborhood's camaraderie and commitment to community engagement, which I especially felt when I visited the Berkeley Community Garden in the South End. From getting residents involved in their neighborhood to improving food access to helping the environment, community gardens play a special role in our city and I believe every neighborhood should be able to enjoy them.

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

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated just how critical access to parks and open spaces is for all Bostonians. For so many people, being able to safely leave their house and get outside was a way of protecting their mental health. Green space is not just an amenity—it is a necessity. Children in every single one of Boston's neighborhoods deserve clean, safe places to play outside and access to the fresh air provided by fully grown, mature tree canopies. Green space is a matter of climate justice, childhood development, and physical and mental health—it's what makes a beautiful, welcoming, thriving city. In addition, I believe we must address access to green space and parks through a racial equity lens and recognize the persistent inequalities that exist within the quality of parks in different neighborhoods. As mayor, I will continue to create new parks and open spaces, and invest in and improve the quality of existing ones, especially in our low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. I will work in partnership with

community stakeholders to ensure our residents have equitable access to safe and high quality open space.

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

As Boston continues to expand, my administration will work to leverage development to ensure that everyone in this city is within a ten-minute walk of an open space. However, increasing access isn't enough. We need to make sure that before we create a new park or greenspace, we have a plan for how that space is going to be maintained for years to come. Too many of the greenspaces in lower-income areas have fallen into disrepair, becoming an eyesore at best and a public safety risk at worst. As mayor, I will ensure that all plans for new parks come with concrete plans for how the space will be maintained for years to come. In my administration, I will reform the BPDA to create a separate planning department tasked with creating master plans for all of our neighborhoods and prioritize long-term, sustainable projects to increase access to parks and open space.

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?

When it comes to open spaces, equity is about more than just being within a certain distance of a park. It is about looking at the neighborhoods most affected by climate change and increasing tree canopies in our greenspaces to improve air quality. It is about looking at the areas that have been most rapidly redeveloped and creating spaces that maintain a certain quality of life for those who call those neighborhoods home. It is about making sure that the condition of the parks in Dorchester or Mattapan are just as good as those in the Back Bay or South End. Equity is about intentional and sustainable investments in our city's parks and greenspaces. Most importantly, achieving equity requires acknowledging the decades of disinvestments in our communities of color and low-income communities that have produced significant health disparities for our residents. I believe our City parks and green spaces are a critical part of the solution to dismantling systemic racism in our City. By investing in open spaces we can mitigate the disproportionate impact of climate change on communities of color and improve health disparities for our historically marginalized residents.

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 1/3 and 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?

Yes, I support increasing the Boston Parks Dept budget to 1%. The ongoing

development boom in Boston offers a clear pathway to expanding parks and outdoor recreation spaces without taking away from other critical services in this city by pushing developers to create green space as part of new projects. By leveraging new development, we can make significant and long-lasting investments in green spaces, ensuring that expansion is tied to an increase in quality of life for the people in those areas.