

Answers are up-to-date as of October 24, 2023

City Council Candidates

Base Questions

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?
2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of **all residents** to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?
3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

*[AL|M] Answers from Bill Coleman

"I am a former member of the library board of directors.

I stand with your thoughts."

[AL|M] Answers from Donna Colorio

No Answer

*[AL|M] Answers from Guillermo Creamer, Jr.

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

I would be unapologetic in defending the right to read for all people. Book banning has no place in Worcester. I can only hope that Massachusetts looks for ways to BAN book banning!

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

I've been very vocal about the fact that Councilors are advocates for our residents, and the Mayor serves as the Chief Advocate. I believe as elected, we must use our platform to defend and advocate on behalf of residents, and I am looking forward to doing that once I am on the Council. It starts with the simple steps of acknowledging the problems facing our society and then codifying our support for the right to read for all residents.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

The library is more than just a place to get books. For many it is a shelter and safe haven. As such, we as a Council must commit ourselves to ensuring our library is not only fully funded but has the extra resources they need to play such a pivotal role in our community. The library must know that they can come to the city for WHATEVER their needs are, and we must be willing to help them in any way possible.

[AL|M] Answers from Joe Petty

No Answer

*[AL|M] Answers from Khrystian King

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

I fully believe in the right to read for all, and will defend against attempts to remove or ban books from Worcester libraries and WPS.

In this moment and during these times, it is increasingly imperative that books are not censored in order for complete and for educational historical purposes and applications. As an elected official in the city I will always stand with supporting quest for information, knowledge, and context.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

Increasing funding for public libraries and community centers to expand resources, programs and collections. Increase internet access in the city through internet access points at parks, community centers and more to ensure everyone, even those without access at home (or without a home) can access any information they may need. Partnering with our local public schools and universities to extend library resources and digital literacy programs for students and families. Support and expand community centers with computers, tablets and educational programs. I have used the computers and printer at the public library and its great in a pinch but we need more options.

Expand our bandwidth as city to make accessing non sensitive government data easier for everyone. Ensure that public meetings, important announcements and non sensitive government proceedings are all accessible online, live streamed, archived and translated. Push to hire more multilingual staff at public institutions to assist through language barriers. Pushing for more digital inclusion by partnering with local non profits and businesses to provide free to affordable technology and internet services for all. Provide robust opportunities for public participation allowing residents to not only engage with whats happening but ask any question they have on what the city doing

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

One of the things that i've been able to do is successfully advocate and secure additional staffing/ social worker to be assigned to worcester public libraries to assist in supporting individuals who would benefit from community service referral opportunities and resources. The fact that the library has had to engage in social services as a direct result of systemic failure on municipal state and federal levels to address issues pertaining to housing mental health substance-abuse in Health disparities. As an Elected official those three reality areas are something that are focal points of my governance as an at-large count as an at-large counselor. Additionally, I have called for and will continue to advocate for an aggregation of quantitative and qualitative data relative to the needs and systemic barriers of those seeking said social services at Worcester libraries.

***[AL] Answers from Domenica Perrone**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

Yes I absolutely agree all people have the right to read and am committed to advocating for that right publicly to defend this right here in Worcester.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

As a proud member of the Worcester Public Library Foundation, I think this issue is very important. We should not wait until it gains momentum to respond as we see this wave across our nation and efforts here in the state. As a City Councilor I would recommend voting on a resolution to prevent censorship in the WPL - for books and activities alike (such as drag story-time). This may look like a comprehensive plan drafted by the CM and our WPL ED, Jason Homer. We also need a council that will advocate publically for this at the state level and work with our state legislatures to ensure bills to prevent censorship are passed.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

I think we should have several things in place around this effort: First, more social workers and recovery coaches who work in the library (maybe even a designated area that is equipped with narcan, etc.). Additionally, I think we need more public restrooms and consistent/accessible warming centers and cooling centers available to alleviate the influx into the library. Ultimately, the creation of more low threshold housing with behavioral health support is necessary to make more upstream solutions to prevent unsheltered houseless experiences.

***[AL] Answers from Johanna Hampton-Dance**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

I strongly believe in the right to read. As a child growing up in project based living, education was first and foremost. Reading was the premise of our education as it was a constant

conversation on how our people (BIPOC) were not allowed to read or write for hundreds of years and the importance of having this privilege should and will not be wasted. I will be a firm advocate against the removal of any books being removed from libraries in Worcester, as knowledge is power.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

I feel the City Council here in the city of Worcester plays an intricate role in ensuring that the rights of all residents to discover are being made a priority. By providing non-restricted access and encouraging engagement we as a city can aid in allowing every resident that would like to participate in utilizing our libraries to do so, working as an elected official I plan to work with the Library Board to come up with innovated, creative ways to ensure that we are encouraging the utilization of our library facilities across the city.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

Taking notice that our libraries (most noticeably) our Salem St. location has been the most utilized location for social outreach and access, I would like to see the city implement resources such as weekly or bi-weekly health checks by partnering with our local hospitals/clinics, assistance monthly with outreach to our immigration population, hiring on a few social workers, and drug addiction counselors who may be able to do outreach from a location that the unhoused, and those suffering from addiction feel safe utilizing. In order to provide these services in the capacity they are needed in, better funding and awareness needs to be provided. When elected to the council I will work with the board to bring these concerns and asks to the council floor as well as the city manager to ensure that all needs will be met.

[AL] Answers from Kate Toomey

No Answer

***[AL] Answers from Maydee Morales**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

Yes, I believe everyone should read what they are interested in.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

I believe this to be our number one role to ensure that all residents rights are met and taken into account in every decision and policy that comes before the council. I will always keep that at the forefront of all my decisions.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

I believe in partnerships and collaborations. I would want the library to collaborate and work together with other community providers in order to meet people's needs and their mission

***[AL] Answers from Moe Bergman**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

Yes I believe all books should be available to read and I would defend the library's right to make all books available to the public. I have the hope, expectation and confidence that the employees of the Worcester public library will make sure all materials are age appropriate as well.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

We have a role. We elect library board members whom we can vet to make sure their beliefs are in accord with what I previously stated. We also approve the library budget so there is financial oversight and control as well.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places

someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

I believe we can budget for a number of these resources but I also believe that while the library has by default become a catch-all social service that isn't its intended purpose and often times other than being used as a shelter is not an ideal substitute for specialized social services. As such, we need to continue to work on homelessness and addiction issues and create and/or improve programs and housing opportunities so that the library can focus on its intended purpose.

***[AL] Answers from Thu Nguyen**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

Yes, absolutely. I think its important that we have access to books. My favorite author Toni Morrison spoke about her books being banned and telling it was. The fear of knowledge, truth, and diverse experiences that creates a culture that is less tolerant, understanding, and people who lack critical thinkings.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

I think as Councilors we represent the values of our city. As part of a democracy we need support and ensure our residents have access to information. My platform has been about accountability, transparency and most importantly making sure that people who are often marginalized are at decision making tables. Often the banned books are the ones that do not fit the narratives of the status quo and challenge the oppressors. As a city councilor, I commit to fighting for folks to be heard, have access to information and take the stance to question any entity that believes they have the power and reason to take this away from any of us.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

I love our library and how it has been a safe haven for so many especially the unhoused and our youth. With that I absolutely agree that our library need more support and I believe in this year budget meeting that was brought up. I was 100% supportive of that without a question. I will keep pushing for more funding and resources for our libraries as it is an investment in our community.

***[D1] Answers from David Peterson**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

Yes absolutely. The idea of removing books from the library is censorship at its worst, and it's more evidence of a small group of people trying to control a large group of people by influencing ideas on what they believe to be appropriate. Regardless of what people think about issues and topics covered in the books, I support freedom of thought, freedom of information, freedom of expression, and freedom of speech.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

I'll preface this by saying that I do think it becomes difficult for Worcester City Council to play a large role in this battle simply because the legislation is coming from the state level. I would caution against guaranteeing too much from my perspective as to what the City Council can do to ensure the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information. However, some ideas of how I and my colleagues can help to at least be influencers:

- Contact our local institutions of higher learning to get involved. Ask them to be an advocate for freedom of speech and be a resource for those looking for one of these "banned books." Promote the fact that even if the state decides to ban certain books from public libraries, work with our colleges - and especially the mobile libraries and bookmobiles - to make sure that some of these titles are available through those methods. The colleges need to be more vocal, especially those that offer programs in English literature like Clark, Holy Cross, Assumption, and WPI (Humanities & Arts).
- Support the Worcester Public Library in a marketing effort to make residents aware of the censorship happening at the state level. This can be done with the help of some of the publishing companies. Bookmarks with profiles of banned books, posters and displays in the WPL highlighting authors of these banned books, resources online directing people to where they can find some of these hard-to-find titles, dialogue sessions at WPL or elsewhere with the authors of these books.
- Letters authored by Worcester City Councilors to State Legislators advocating for the freedom of speech and freedom of expression and cautioning against the effects of censorship.

- A series of "Banned Book Report Nights" at local coffee shops or at the Worcester Public Library with coffee provided by local shops. I envision these similar to poetry slams or open mic nights where someone could literally give an old-fashioned book report like you and I used to do in school. Then the "Banned Book Report" could turn into a dialogue with a moderator who could lead the discussion about the theories and issues presented in the book and why some people find those ideas to be controversial. Perhaps invite the author for a Zoom session Q&A. Acoustic Java on Brussels St has a great space for this, by the way.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

The library states as its mission:

The Worcester Public Library serves as a gathering place that actively promotes the free exchange of ideas in our democratic society. The Library makes information and services available to all people while fostering intellectual freedom, protecting privacy, encouraging personal growth and enrichment, and celebrating our diverse community heritage.

While I see your point that it serves as a catch-all social service for the most vulnerable among us, I do not think the library is appropriately equipped for, nor does it want to participate in this manner for the residents of the city. Without drastically changing its mission statement, the Worcester Public Library cannot and should not be an active participant in providing free, safe shelter for those in need. The Council needs to focus on improving relationships between residents and safety officers, increasing access points for those looking for help, green-lighting sensible projects that provide low-income housing or shelters in areas close to public transit, and enacting more measures that keep drugs off our streets. If we can do that, then the library shouldn't need any additional resources to serve as a catch-all social service and can put full effort into fulfilling its primary mission. I'm looking forward to hearing more about this from Jason Homer, Executive Director of the Worcester Public Library, when he speaks to us at the North Worcester Business Association on October 18th. I'd love to hear his perspective on it. Let me know if you'd like to attend as a guest.

***[D1] Answers from Jenny Pacillo**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

I absolutely believe in the right to read and would defend that right against attempts to remove

books from libraries and schools in Worcester. We need to trust parents and guardians to make decisions about what books they and their children read. You don't have the right to prevent other people's kids from reading books that you don't like.

As a mom of three, I believe it is vital that kids and readers of all ages see themselves and their families in books. I have been intentional with the content of my kids' library at home, and make sure they have stories with diverse cultures, the queer community, folks with disabilities, etc. Books allow us to grow and learn about diverse ideas and experiences outside of our own. Banning books from public libraries and schools is harmful and strips away equitable access.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

I see the role of Worcester City Council as leading in terms of funding, policy, and advocacy to ensure the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information as serving leaders in terms of funding, policy, and advocacy. I am proud to have led the charge as a citizen for transparency and access to city council meetings through permanent hybrid participation in city council meetings.

As the next District 1 City Councilor, I commit to listening to & working with librarians, staff, and teachers to learn and respond to the challenges and attacks they are facing. I will clearly speak out against attempts to silence marginalized voices and remove books and will support municipal and state policies & legislation defending the right to read.

The WPL's monthly calendar of activities and classes for people of all ages is impressive, and I will always support and share their message.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

Our public libraries do so much to help our community outside of providing access to books. I have taken my kids to countless storytimes, summer reading parties, and even attended my neighborhood meetings at libraries throughout the city. Worcester's libraries are also one of the only places in the city that are free, safe, and welcoming to individuals who may not have anywhere else to go. As a city, we need to build capacity to positively engage and support folks navigating being unhoused, living with substance use disorder, trauma, & food insecurity.

I saw recently that the City of Worcester is hiring a social worker for the Worcester Public

Library. I think investing funds into hiring more trained staff dedicated to engaging with vulnerable library patrons to provide information, support, and referrals to appropriate organizations and services will help aid the library in fulfilling its main mission. I want to listen and work with librarians, especially in my district, to learn how I can help support them and the library in fulfilling their mission.

As a city councilor, I would advocate for the city opting into Paid Family Medical Leave. We have an obligation to provide municipal employees with good salaries and comprehensive paid leave that allows them to care for themselves and their families. As a city, we need to better support our employees so they are able to show up and do the important work of serving our city's residents.

***[D2] Answers from Robert Bilotta**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

I believe in the right to read for all people and would defend that right against any attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester. We absolutely need to protect people's right to gain knowledge and access information.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

I believe the city council can to defend against any attempts to ban books at any of our libraries or mitigate funding by working with our legislators to ensure information remains accessible to all communities .

I also believe the city council can help improve our library infrastructure and accessibility, and expand programming by advocating for funding, exploring community partnerships. This is something I would work on, Worcester has an incredible network of organizations and service providers which can be a great asset for our libraries.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

The council needs to work to address services for vulnerable communities, improving community mental health and substance abuse services. I think WPD should do foot patrols downtown, and by the library, this can mitigate illegal activity and improve community engagement. Also Improving public restrooms, like we talked about yesterday. There is more we can do to make sure the library is a safe and welcoming space for all. This is a significant challenge for Worcester right now and we can't expect the library to be a catch all for social services without supports.

[D2] Answers from Candy Mero-Carlson

No Answer

*[D3] Answers from George Russell

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

I don't believe in book bans and will do everything I can to protect the the rights of people to write and read what they want.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

The role of a Worcester City Councilor is to provide policy and budget approval not micro manage any department including the library. I have always supported the library including recent expansion and extra funding for more staff including social service staff.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

Again see answer above. As the City Manager has added to request for the library I have supported them including social service and related support staff.

*[D3] Answers from Feanna Jattan-Singh

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

Yes I support the right to read for all people, when I was younger I even got certified to teach illiterate adults how to read, back in high school, when I was in Future Business Leaders of America.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

I think the city council can work in conjunction with the University's similar to how Clark University has a public library in the school, we should have more libraries in more schools accessible to the public.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

I think we should have staff at the libraries to assist member of the community with the challenges of the community. Mental health counselors, Substance abuse councilors, housing resource, job resources, we should have a dedicated space in the library for access services that everyone needs. If I am elected I will work towards having this. During the pandemic we got vaccinated and boosted at the library, if we can do that, I don't see why we can't have mental health services at the library too.

[D4] Answers from Katia Norford

No Answer

***[D4] Answers from Luis Ojeda**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

I do believe in the right to read for all people and would help to defend that right against removing books from libraries in Worcester.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

Stories of marginalized groups have been hidden, falsified, and censored by conservative groups in the U.S. for centuries. Whether controversial or not, people should be able to find materials that help them learn, educate others, and advocate for themselves. I believe it is the role of the Worcester City Council to ensure policies uphold and protect the interests of residents in having access to information, and the ability to choose what information they engage with.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

To aid the library in ensuring it can fulfill its primary mission, the Council can work to address and bring more awareness to the issues contributing to the strain on the libraries, and advocate for increased funding to support services as well as meet staffing needs. As a Councilor, I will listen to the needs and concerns of library staff and patrons, advocate for policies or practices that protect intellectual freedom, and help to develop partnerships with agencies that can help address the larger issues like homelessness and lack of affordable housing. I will also help to promote initiatives that celebrate the diversity of our community.

***[D5] Answers from Etel Haxhiaj**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

I believe public libraries are a foundational piece of both our education system and of democracy. This is only true though when we provide the full resources our libraries need and allow, encourage and defend the free flow of ideas.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester City Council in ensuring the rights of all residents to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected city council member to fulfill this role?

I believe at the top of my responsibility list as a City Councilor is paying attention and asking questions of our Administration to ensure that our public libraries are receiving the resources needed to operate fully. Similarly I know I have been conscious and worried these past few

years as it feels Worcester has become increasingly comfortable with allowing our libraries to become a primary solution to opening heating/cooling stations or caring for Worcester's unhoused.

3. In addition to preparing for challenges, Worcester's librarians are facing increasing strain across the city, in large part because of larger systemic failures that all roll downhill onto the most vulnerable among us. As one of, and often the only, places someone can go inside, safely, for free, in our city (and most cities), the library needs additional resources if it is going to serve as the catch-all social service that it has become. What do you think this council can do to aid in ensuring the library can fulfill its primary mission and what will you do as a councilor to help?

I have been paying very close attention to this issue as mentioned previously. I was glad to know that the plan to hire a social worker at the WPL Main Branch was able to move forward so that some of these burdens were at least not completely falling on librarians' shoulders. I supported your ED's advocacy for the Manager to allocate funds to hire a social worker.

We need to keep elevating the importance of our public libraries while also naming challenges being placed on them as you did here. We cannot and should not continue to choose the WPL as the preferred social service catch-all. We need to continue to challenge that and challenge our administration to take pro-active steps responding to the un-house instead.

And also as part of showing we're paying attention and care. I also just need to squeeze in here, that Worcester needs to provide paid family medical leave for our library staff. I led on this issue and met several time with library staff who reached out to me, and put an order to support this call to action.

[D5] Answers from Jose Rivera

No Answer

School Committee Candidates

Base Questions

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

2. What role do you see for the Worcester School Committee in ensuring the rights of **students** to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected school committee member to fulfill this role?

3. Knowing that there are infrastructure constraints at play, what (next) steps would you take to move Worcester toward having a full-time, professional librarian in every school?

***[AL] Answers from Tracy O'Connell Novick**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

Yes.

While I realize that fully answers the question, a bit more: As a former English teacher, I am ferocious about the right that everyone—and this very much includes children—have to access books and other information. We say that books can be windows or mirrors; in some cases, books and other materials are the only place that people can see themselves or the only place in which they see those not like them.

That is a right that children possess, incidentally, independent of the adults in their lives.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester School Committee in ensuring the rights of students to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected school committee member to fulfill this role?

The “Instruction” section of our policies leads with [a policy on academic freedom](#), which reads as follows:

The School Committee seeks to educate students in the democratic tradition, to foster recognition of individual freedom and social responsibility, to inspire meaningful awareness of and respect for the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Fairness in procedures will be observed both to safeguard the legitimate interests of the schools and to exhibit by appropriate example the basic objectives of a democratic society as set forth in the Constitutions of the United States and the Commonwealth.

I quote that in full because I think understanding our responsibility as a school district is to be educating students to be full members of the functioning of a democratic society—which constitutionally is why we have public education in Massachusetts—is an important framing. It changes how one approaches decision-making as a policy maker if one understands that at the end of this, we need healthy, well-informed, thoughtful, compassionate people who can make good decisions for the future not only of themselves but also of the larger community.

More specifically, we are the budget oversight, the policy makers, and the evaluators of the superintendent. In each of those realms, we have responsibilities: how do we budget not only for materials, but for those who work with students on engaging with information? How do our policies allow for, support, and further students accessing information? What barriers might we

be creating? And how is the day to day responsibility of that carried out through the work of the superintendent?

And while I think our current policy on adoption of materials is strong, we might see about strengthening the reconsideration policy.

3. Knowing that there are infrastructure constraints at play, what (next) steps would you take to move Worcester toward having a full-time, professional librarian in every school?

I think librarians need libraries, which is of course the infrastructure constraint. We have the same number of students in seven fewer buildings than we did two decades ago, and so space that was libraries is gone in many schools (and that for the schools that had them).

The next thing that needs to be done on that (which I believe will be part of the coming strategic plan) is a comprehensive master plan, that lays out what we're going to do about elementary schools (in particular) in Worcester: where are the students and where are the buildings and what do we do next?

The schools we have built this century were built, in the main, with library space; it's just managing to get that space and then that staff.

***[AL] Answers from Laura Clancey**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

I do believe in the right to read. I would defend the attempt to remove books from libraries in Worcester. I have raised two daughters who are avid readers and I do not believe in policing what they have chosen to read and I would not anyone else to make that decision for my children.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester School Committee in ensuring the rights of students to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected school committee member to fulfill this role?

I believe it is the role of a School Committee member to create policies to ensure the rights of all our students.

3. Knowing that there are infrastructure constraints at play, what (next) steps would you take to move Worcester toward having a full-time, professional librarian in every school?

We have asked for this to be looked at across all schools in the city. We know not all of our schools have libraries. Many would be surprised to know that even some of our newer buildings with designated libraries remain unused as libraries as those spaces have had to be used in other capacities to account for the space needed. I believe we need to work closely with

Worcester Public Library and continue to support the services they provide for our students, such as Libby.

***[AL] Answers from Sue Mailman**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

Yes.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester School Committee in ensuring the rights of students to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected school committee member to fulfill this role?

I think there is an obligation for all that are concerned with restrictions of access to stay informed, to take seriously any and all potential efforts to curtail rights of students to discover, access and engage with information and to support policy that pro-actively blocks further challenges

3. Knowing that there are infrastructure constraints at play, what (next) steps would you take to move Worcester toward having a full-time, professional librarian in every school?

We have to be realistic about expectations and creative about library access. I'd like to find ways to further have our students access our Salem Square library.

[AL] Answers from Maureen Binienda

No Answer

***[DA] Answers from Molly McCullough**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

I believe in the right to read for all people. Libraries should be safe spaces where everyone, regardless of their background or beliefs, can access a wide range of materials and ideas. As a past board member of the Worcester Public Library Foundation, I have been an ardent supporter of WPL and access to books for students and all residents. I would defend this right by working to ensure that the selection of library materials is guided by professional librarians and educators rather than influenced by external pressures. I would also advocate for

transparent and inclusive policies for addressing challenges to library materials, emphasizing the importance of diverse and inclusive collections.

2. What role do you see for the Worcester School Committee in ensuring the rights of students to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected school committee member to fulfill this role?

The Worcester School Committee plays an important role in ensuring the rights of students to discover, access, and engage with information. As a committee member, I will continue to support policies that protect and promote intellectual freedom in our schools. This includes advocating for diverse and inclusive reading materials, protecting students' rights to read and explore a wide range of topics, and fostering an environment where students can develop critical thinking skills. I would also work to ensure that the curriculum is well-rounded and reflects a diverse array of perspectives and voices.

3. Knowing that there are infrastructure constraints at play, what (next) steps would you take to move Worcester toward having a full-time, professional librarian in every school?

Recognizing the importance of libraries in schools, I have filed several items during my time on SC and advocated around libraries and librarians. Some of the challenges for having an actual library or librarians are space, funding and objectives. This is not to say that literacy is not a priority of the district, because we certainly know that we have a literacy focus in order to improve reading at grade level. We have assessed where we have libraries at schools and which schools at the secondary level have librarians/media teachers.

We need to continue supporting elementary classroom libraries and promoting reading at the classroom level and through a variety of other opportunities. We need to carry on our work with the Worcester Public Library and utilization of our One City One Library branches, our Libby mobile libraries and other resources that our students can benefit from. We can explore additional partnerships with local libraries, universities, and other institutions to provide support and resources for school libraries and classroom libraries.

[DB] Answers from Vanessa Zuleyma Alvarez

No Answer

[DC] Answers from Dianna Biancheria

Did not respond to survey questions but emailed back asking where I live? (I am in this district so, unclear what's going on here.)

***[DC] Answers from Jermoh V. Kamara**

1. Do you believe in the right to read, for all people, and would you defend that right against attempts to remove books from libraries in Worcester?

The right to read and the access to information are fundamental human rights and they should be available to everyone without exception. It is our responsibility to ensure that every child and their parents have the freedom to choose what is in their best interest. My view on this matter aligns with article 17 of UNICEF's Convention on the Rights of the Child which stipulates, "Children have the right to get information from the Internet, radio, television, newspapers, books and other sources. Adults should make sure the information they are getting is not harmful. Governments should encourage the media to share information from lots of different sources, in languages that all children can understand."

2. What role do you see for the Worcester School Committee in ensuring the rights of students to discover, access, and engage with information? What actions would you take as an elected school committee member to fulfill this role?

As an elected school committee member, my role is to ensure that every student has the right to discover, access, and engage with information. To fulfill this role, I believe in taking the following actions:

- Promoting the use of diverse literature and resources in classrooms and libraries.
- Encouraging the implementation of media literacy education to help students navigate the vast amount of information available to them.
- Advocating for the protection of students' First Amendment rights, including freedom of speech and press.
- Supporting the use of technology and digital resources to enhance learning opportunities for all students.

I believe that by taking these actions, we can empower our students to become informed, critical thinkers who are prepared to engage with the world around them.

3. Knowing that there are infrastructure constraints at play, what (next) steps would you take to move Worcester toward having a full-time, professional librarian in every school?

In the past year, an item I proposed conducted a review on the number of schools with and without libraries and found that it is imperative for WPS to support schools currently without a library. To address this, I proposed partnering with Worcester Public Library's "One Library" program to provide elementary schools without library spaces access to a "One Library". This is pending. Additionally, I proposed repurposing WPS yellow buses into Reading Buses that can be stationed at schools without a library. With the School Committee and administration's help, we can engage stakeholders and donors to fund these projects. Let's take the first step towards addressing limited library space in WPS and increasing staffing by allocating more funding in this line item.

[DD] Answers from Alejandro Guardiola, Jr.

No Answer

[DE] Answers from Nelly Medina

No Answer

[DE] Answers from Kathleen L. Roy

No Answer

[DF] Answers from Jermaine Lamont Johnson

No Answer