AT-LARGE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE: Erin Murphy

1. What letter grade would you give Mayor Wu at this point in her tenure?
As someone who taught in the Boston Public Schools, I had a reputation as a fairly easy grader. But I taught kindergarten, and I think the mayor of the greatest city in the world should be held to a higher standard. Mayor Wu gets an “incomplete” from me because I think she still has a lot of work left to do, but I'm hopeful she'll finish with an “A.” That would be good for everyone.

2. What's the best thing the council did this term, and what's the biggest mistake it made?
Perhaps I'm biased because it's an issue near and dear to my heart, and was the first home rule petition I filed upon taking office, but we increased access to voting for our men and women in uniform who are unable to go to their home polling places. For uniformed services voters who are deployed outside their voting districts, they can apply for an absentee ballot and vote electronically. I think that’s an important improvement. As Chair of the Council Committee on Veterans, Military Families, and Military Affairs, I’m very proud of that.

The biggest mistake was no single policy decision, but that the actions of some of my colleagues – on a whole range of issues, including personal behavior – have eroded the public's trust in us. I’m hopeful that we can earn that back, but by no means do I think it'll be easy and I hope that my colleagues recognize how important it is for our constituents, the people of Boston, to feel confident in the people they elect to represent them.

3. What's the first piece of legislation you'd file next term?
As a longtime special education ESL teacher, I want to continue advocating for our ESL and special ed students, whom we have historically not adequately prepared, particularly with regards to reading resources. Time and again, the Boston Public Schools have underserved special ed ESL students, and it shows up in the test scores and in long-term outcomes. So I'll be filing legislation focused on increased access to reading resources and increased investment in universal pre-K. This is about closing achievement gaps, addressing historical inequities, and opening a brighter future for Boston’s children and families.

4. Do you support building a new recovery campus at the edge of Franklin Park?
I am not currently supportive of the proposal because I don't believe that community concerns about safety have been addressed, and I think key questions remain unanswered – many of them dealing with the sizable estimate of the influx of people and how that influx would fit within the community fabric as it exists now.
I’ve long advocated for more community input into similar proposals elsewhere in the city, and I will continue to do the same thing regarding the proposal at the Shattuck. Boston does need more recovery beds across the city. But we need to ensure that they are sited and scaled in appropriate locations and – just as importantly – with appropriate community input. And the enterprise should not be confined within the city limits, because many of the people who are on our streets are not from Boston, and the responsibility should be shared by other cities and towns in metropolitan Boston, rather than wedged into some of our city’s densest neighborhoods. I’ve been making that case and will continue to. I think the burden of proof rests with the project’s proposers to convince neighborhood stakeholders that some of the worst fears, that there will be a replication of the terrible situation at Mass and Cass, will not come to pass. I’m not willing to support a program if its proponents cannot convince me – and more importantly, the people in that neighborhood – that the project will not have a negative effect on the neighborhood, the park, and the surrounding areas. And I’m not convinced yet.

5. Is there anything the city should be doing differently to address the intersecting crises at Mass and Cass?
I voted in favor of Mayor Wu’s ordinance last week to remove the tents at Mass and Cass, but there’s hard work still ahead of us to ensure that all city departments are held accountable for their promises. It’s not just shelter beds that are needed; we have to ensure more recovery services and long-term treatment. The project on Long Island – a new facility and all the promises that came with it – could be a long way off, but the need is now, and it’s urgent. So all of the promises that were made about Long Island, those services should be delivered now because the need is now, and we could be doing things today.

I think we also need to be vigilant about “spillover encampments” in nearby neighborhoods like Nubian Square, that could be unfairly impacted by the dislocation and relocation from Mass and Cass.

6. Do you support plans to move the John D. O’Bryant to West Roxbury?
I share the concerns of some of my Council colleagues and O’Bryant teachers, students and families with both the decision-making process behind the plan to relocate the John D. O’Bryant School of Mathematics and Science and, more importantly, the significant hurdle the plan poses to an improved education environment for our students.

After the plan was announced, in early June, I said then that the city and Boston Public Schools system “have plenty of buildings and sites to choose from that would not radically disrupt the O’Bryant’s long standing connections to the neighborhoods, families, and businesses that make it thrive.” At the time, I proposed “renovating or building a state-of-the-art, 21st Century
campus for the O’Bryant that is centrally located in the City, so that the students and families of Dorchester and Roxbury who have built the O’Bryant into one of the very best public high schools in America are able to access it, and remain the driving force behind its continued success.”

I still feel that way, and I applaud Councilors Mejia and Fernandes Anderson for using their roles as Chairs of the Education Committee and Ways and Means Committee, respectively, in August to ask city employees like those from the Boston Public Schools and Boston Public Schools Transportation Departments to appear before elected representatives and answer questions. As a governing measure specifically designed to exact more information that we can use to take action and improve our city – in this case seeking optimal educational outcomes for our students – this is precisely the action we should be taking.

John D. O’Bryant was a giant in the annals of public education in Boston, the city’s first African American guidance counselor in the city, the first African American elected to the Boston School Committee in 75 years, the first African American vice president at Northeastern University. The school named in his honor warrants, as I said in June, not to be used, “once again, as a pawn or a puzzle piece in a larger master scheme.”

7. Was the council's approval of $3.4 million in grant funding for the Boston Regional Intelligence Center the right move?
Yes, and overdue. Crime prevention in our most vulnerable neighborhoods and antiterrorism initiatives forged between the Boston Police Department and federal authorities help keep our city safe.

8. The council has become increasingly acrimonious in the last two years. Who or what is responsible?
I don’t think it’s just the Boston City Council, I think that our public dialogue generally has grown coarser, and that’s very unfortunate. I think that some of the ad hominem attacks, the vulgarities, and a general lack of respect really shouldn’t have a place on the Council, and I’m hopeful that in the next term we’ll see some of that abate. I believe that we, as elected officials, should be held to a higher standard and set an example with our behavior, rather than helping others lower the bar.

9. What else should voters know about you?
That I know how hard it is for working families, and that I work every day to make sure my constituents across the city are provided the service they deserve in an elected official. I take my job as an At-Large Councilor very seriously, and that means being in as many
neighborhoods as I can as often as I can: everywhere and all the time. That the oath I took and the charge that voters gave me is one I take very seriously, so try always to follow through on constituent requests for services. That the historical inequities of our city and our system, and how to fix them and create a world-class city that truly does work for all its residents, is at the top of my agenda. That the lessons I learned in the classroom as a Boston Public Schools teacher for more than 20 years, I brought to City Hall, to be accountable and responsive and to always, always care.