AT-LARGE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE: Ruthzee Louijeune

1. What letter grade would you give Mayor Wu at this point in her tenure? B+. She became mayor at a very difficult time for the city and has brought many of her bold ideas to fruition. When it comes to housing justice, climate justice and uplifting our small businesses, she has worked hard to move the city forward. As a city, we still are experiencing a lot of deeply entrenched issues which are difficult to resolve. We can continue to improve when it comes to engaging the community on specific issues and allowing them to have an active voice in the investments and proposals for our neighborhoods, but this Administration continues to uplift our neighborhoods and center equity in its work in a way that makes me glad to be a partner with it in this work of building a better Boston.

2. What's the best thing the council did this term, and what's the biggest mistake it made? The Council's biggest accomplishment was our efforts to utilize ARPA funding to make historic, transformative, equitable investments in our community. We allocated funding to advance affordable housing and homeownership opportunities, to support our small businesses as we came out of the pandemic, and to invest in early education.

The biggest challenge that our Council faced was neglecting to build collegiality as we should have so that the city could have a more productive Council.

3. What's the first piece of legislation you'd file next term? During my first term, I prioritized housing. I would continue that work at the beginning of a new term. I am eager to leverage city-owned land to elevate investments in affordable housing and homeownership. I would hold a hearing so that the public can be made aware of the opportunities and city investments, and deepening relationships with community land trusts and non-profit developers to invest in housing that prevents displacement.

4. Do you support building a new recovery campus at the edge of Franklin Park? Addressing the disease of addiction and supporting those with mental health challenges requires an all hands-on-deck approach. This problem is not specific to one neighborhood and we all have a responsibility when it comes to supporting our neighbors in recovery. There is a lot of work that needs to be done on the proposal to make it feasible and equitable for our city. We also need the state to be more hands-on to find solutions to this crisis in areas not concentrated in Boston.

5. Is there anything the city should be doing differently to address the intersecting crises at Mass and Cass?
We must build stronger partnership with the state so there are more treatment beds and longer treatment stays as Dr. Ojikutu recommended. It is critical that we deploy a housing and treatment model simultaneously, as well as getting Long Island operational as soon as possible.

6. Do you support plans to move the John D. O’Bryant to West Roxbury?
In order for this to be a viable plan, we need to have more conversations with community members. I am encouraged by the idea that Madison Park and the O’Bryant would both be getting their own campus, although we need to think about the deep transportation challenges that will present themselves with the move of OB. I am a proponent for more citywide schools and bringing students across our communities together. West Roxbury as a neighborhood is pretty south for some of our neighborhood kids in East Boston and Charlestown, for example, and so we would need to make sure this move would not sideline them.

7. Was the council's approval of $3.4 million in grant funding for the Boston Regional Intelligence Center the right move?
It was not the right move. As a Council, we didn’t have enough information and only received answers to questions ninety minutes before the vote. There is still a lack of transparency and oversight. We have had courts and prior councils question whether BRIC functioned in a capacity that did harm to Black, Brown, and immigrant communities in our city. We routinely and unanimously approve all kinds of grants for BPD for various purposes as a body. The issue primarily at hand here is with the gang database within BRIC, which has led to the faulty deportation of an immigrant in East Boston. We have to hold the BRIC accountable, and the Council cannot be a rubber stamp for funding that may cause harm without making BRIC more accountable.

8. The council has become increasingly acrimonious in the last two years. Who or what is responsible?
We had a lot of new Council members come in during the heightened period of COVID, which added pressure to what would already be a challenging role to learn. We are also in an increasingly toxic political environment both nationally and locally. It is difficult to navigate that space, and social media doesn't help. As a body, we must do more work to build collegial relationships and put strong personalities aside for the greater good of the Council and the people of Boston. Our residents just want to see us doing the work and addressing issues of trash, improving schools, and ensuring everyone has a place to call home. This is all feasible, even when we do not agree on everything. We are a big city, and have a lot of diverse opinions, but there are things that we can agree on and we have to show that to the public more.

9. What else should voters know about you?
I am incredibly committed to this job and the work of justice. I care deeply for every neighborhood and every resident and am ready to continue representing each and every one of you. Fueled with a deep love for this city, the understanding of the privilege that it is to get to do this work every day, and with boba tea in hand: Term 2, bring it on!