

Alderman-at-Large Luis Morale's Responses to Questions for Aldermanic Candidates

1. **Jobs** - As you know, a lot of people in East Somerville need work, or need better jobs. This was the #1 priority at last year's East Somerville Initiative that involved hundreds of residents and businesses in setting priorities. As Alderman, how would you try to make sure that local residents get hired for jobs that are created by new development and businesses moving into town, for example Ikea and Assembly Square?

As business owner in East Somerville, I am committed to creating jobs for Somerville residents in our neighborhoods. As a resident near East Somerville and as a pastor and community leader, I am proud to have been involved in the East Somerville Initiative. I believe this initiative is a model for the whole city, and demonstrates the power that residents have to strengthen our community when we unite behind common priorities.

As Alderman At Large I promise to be an advocate for local job creation, and will make sure that large developers and big corporations do their part to help strengthen our neighborhoods. I will work with residents and community groups like SCC to monitor Ikea and make sure they fulfill their end of the bargain. As a municipal elected official I will make sure the City of Somerville prioritizes job creation for local residents, and I will make sure local hiring agreements are expanded to development in other parts of the city, including Boynton Yards and along the Green Line extension corridor.

2. **East Somerville Community School** - As Alderman, what would you do to move forward the rebuilding of the East Somerville Community School? Parents and the community were promised that the school would be rebuilt, and now almost 2 year later there has been little progress and no rebuilding on the horizon. Having ESCS students scattered among 3 schools has caused great hardship for families and has been a lot for the community as well.

My daughter Cadis attended the ESCS before the fire, so this is a situation that my family has dealt with first-hand. I don't know why so little progress has been made, but I'm sure the situation is not helped by the national economic recession which is squeezing our city budget.

However, I also believe that the current city leadership has not done enough to prioritize youth activities and services in Somerville. Having a burnt-down school in the heart of our city is simply unacceptable. As Alderman At Large I will be a strong leader on this issue. I will use my position to advocate for state or federal money to pay for rebuilding the ESCS. It seems that money could be available through the federal stimulus package.

3. **Traffic on lower Broadway, & pedestrian and bike access:**
 - Do you support the redesign of McGrath Highway to remove the T overpass from Twin Cities to Union Square and replace it with an at-grade boulevard?

Unfortunately, I do not know enough about this issue to make a firm commitment. I look forward to hearing from East Somerville residents about their opinion on the matter. Generally, I think it is a good idea to invest in public transportation in order to reduce traffic congestion in our neighborhoods and to provide Somerville residents with sustainable and accessible alternatives to cars. This is particularly important in East Somerville where poor we are surrounded by highways that have caused unhealthy levels of air pollution in our neighborhood.

- What would you do to improve safety for pedestrians and bike riders in East Somerville? In particular, please address difficulty in crossing McGrath Highway and the increase in traffic that will result when the IKEA store is opened at Assembly Square.

I am seriously concerned about the conditions that pedestrians and bike riders face in East Somerville, particularly when crossing McGrath Highway. I support the East Somerville residents who put pressure on the DCR to increase pedestrian crossing times at McGrath. As Alderman At Large I will work with concerned residents in East Somerville to continue pressing the DCR for improved conditions.

As Alderman at Large I will make construction of a pedestrian bridge over McGrath a top priority. While I understand that the City of Somerville alone does not have the resources to build a bridge, I believe our local leaders have not done enough to identify state or federal funds. Why can't stimulus money that is being spent to repair highways throughout the state also be directed to improve access for pedestrians in our neighborhoods?

Furthermore I do not believe the city is prepared for the increase in traffic that might occur after Ikea is built. While I appreciate the commitment that Ikea and state agencies have made to improve public transportation to Assembly Square from outside Somerville, I feel more needs to be done to address conditions here in our neighborhoods. Again, the city is strapped for cash but Ikea is a wealthy corporation. As Alderman at Large I will ask Ikea to invest in our neighborhood by contributing to important pedestrian and bicycle improvement projects like the pedestrian bridge, expansion of bike lanes in East Somerville, and an extension of the Somerville community bike path to the east.

- Would you support or object to a commuter rail stop at Sullivan Square that is being considered by EOT? Please address concerns about increasing air pollution from stopping the diesel trains and an increase in people boarding the Orange Line at Sullivan that would result from this change.

Again, this is a project that I do not have enough information about to make a firm statement about my position. While I understand the concern about air pollution from diesel trains, I believe the consequences could be limited if more people get out of their cars and onto public transportation. Furthermore, a commuter rail stop at Somerville would improve non-car access to Ikea and Assembly Square, thereby reducing traffic in our neighborhoods. I look forward to hearing from residents on this issue.

4. **Anti-displacement plan** - With development in Assembly Square and the coming of the Green Line to Somerville, residents are concerned that low to moderate income Somervillians may be priced out of Somerville. Would you support a City role in the development of an anti-displacement plan to preserve, defend and promote affordable rental and home ownership? What should that plan include?

Yes, I would support a city role in development of an anti-displacement plan. During this campaign I have talked about the creation of an Anti-Displacement Commission within the City of Somerville. While the commission can not replace the important work of community-based organizations, I believe it can help increase the City's commitment to this issue. The commission would be tasked with monitoring new development throughout the city, to ensure that all inclusionary zoning, linkage fee, and other anti-displacement regulations are being met by both private developers and city agencies.

Membership should include residents from every ward, and should represent the rich economic, linguistic, and cultural diversity in our city.

5. **Policies for affordable housing** – As Alderman, would you support strengthening city policies, such as

- Increasing the percentage of **inclusionary zoning** in new housing development, and deepening affordability by using Somerville incomes rather than the greater Boston region's incomes as the standard;

Without question I support increasing the inclusionary zoning percentage citywide, and using Somerville incomes to deepen affordability. Furthermore, I support even higher percentages in neighborhoods adjacent to public transportation stations, including the Green Line corridor.

- Lowering the threshold for **linkage** and closing loopholes, so that more commercial development will better fund more affordable housing?

Yes, I do support lowering the linkage threshold. I believe setting the threshold at 20,000 square feet would be effective to increase funds for affordable housing without hampering new commercial development.

6. **Expiring use** - In Somerville, over 370 units of affordable housing in so-called "expiring use" buildings could be at risk in the next year, including two buildings in East Somerville. Would you actively campaign to preserve these homes through local negotiation, and lobbying for state and federal legislation?

Yes, I will actively campaign to preserve expiring use properties in Somerville. I will be proud to support state and federal legislation that protects expiring use.

7. **Gentrification** -

- What does the word "gentrification" mean to you?

Gentrification is a word that, until recently I was not familiar with. However, the concept is one that has become clear to me as a Somerville resident for the last 30 years. Since I came here in 1980 I have struggled to afford housing, and faced challenges keeping my family here as housing prices continue to rise. I am fortunate that I was able to purchase a home 12 years ago, but I know that Somerville's working population is still at risk. As a counselor and pastor in the community, I meet lifelong Somerville residents as well as new immigrants who struggle to make ends meet in Somerville.

- How will future developments affect the working families of Somerville?

If priorities in Somerville continue without change, I believe future developments will have a devastating impact on the working families of Somerville. In the past decade, an incredible amount of city money and time has been spent helping Ikea come to Somerville. During the same time, the city has resisted changes that improve housing affordability for working families, fearing it might scare away developers.

- Would you support affordable housing being built in your neighborhood?

Yes, I would be proud to support affordable housing being built in my neighborhood.

- A large majority of residents in Somerville are renters. What are your feelings about the recently tabled Condo Conversion ordinance?

I believe we must do more to protect low and moderate income Somerville residents, the elderly and disabled, and other groups who suffer the most when their rental units are converted to condominium.

8. **The Green line extension** - The Green Line will drastically change our community, enhancing access to rapid transit. What are some concrete ways that you could engage the community in land-use planning regarding the extension of the Green Line to Somerville, specifically focusing on those community members historically not engaged in urban planning?

The Anti-Displacement Commission I have proposed and outlined in a previous question is one concrete way that we can engage community members in land use planning of the Green Line. In addition, as Alderman At Large I will insist that every city-sponsored community meeting be announced in Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole. The city must also continue to work with groups like the Welcome Project to provide translation services during every city-sponsored meeting.