



Dear Neighbor,

My name is Kenzie Bok. I grew up in this community and have dedicated myself to serving our neighborhoods as an involved citizen. Now I'm running to represent us as our City Councilor for District 8, so **I'm writing to ask for your vote on Tuesday, September 24.**

Our current city councilor, Josh Zakim, is not running for reelection. There are six candidates in the race, and I know each one cares about our community. I think my background in active community work and my record of accomplishment at the city level will enable me to be the most effective advocate for our neighborhoods' shared concerns.

I believe passionately in a city that has a place for everyone. I am running for Boston City Council to make sure that our families can afford to stay in the city, our seniors can age in place, our small businesses can thrive, and every child in Boston has access to a quality education. If I'm elected, I will work to strengthen our transportation system, care for the public parks, streets, and historic treasures of our unique urban neighborhoods, and help our city lead with a robust response to the crisis of climate change. These needs are urgent, but I know we can achieve all these things if we work together collectively.

I'm a problem-solver who thinks big and follows up with action. For example,

- I've been a leader in finding creative policy solutions to our affordable housing crisis, **launching major new affordable housing initiatives** in my role as Senior Advisor for Policy & Planning at the Boston Housing Authority.
- In 2016, I was one of the **lead citizen organizers of the successful Community Preservation Act campaign**, which secured more funding for affordable housing, parks, and historic preservation in our neighborhoods.
- I served as **Budget Director** for a Boston City Councilor At-Large, and volunteered as the **Planning Co-Chair** of a neighborhood association, so I know how to actually make resident voices heard in the city's budgeting and development processes.

I'm also active in other ways. I teach history and philosophy to college undergrads as a lecturer at Harvard University. I serve on the vestry of Trinity Church in Copley Square and on the board of MAHA, a local affordable homeownership organization. I have also been the chair of the Ward 5 Democrats, and a leader within the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO). I've been involved in civic advocacy and public policy in Boston for my entire life, and I would be honored to extend those efforts to meet our city's greatest needs by representing our communities on the City Council.

In running for this office, **I'm honored to have earned the support of many local leaders who have witnessed my work firsthand.** State Rep. Jay Livingstone and At-Large Councilors Michelle Wu and Annissa Essaibi-George have all endorsed me, as have community-based organizations like the Ward 5 Democrats and Local 26, the hotel-workers union that worked with me to pass the Community Preservation Act.

The voters across our district are incredibly engaged, and I know a single letter cannot address all the core issues of our community. Below I have included some more in-depth information about my biography and why I'm running. **If you have any further questions, please visit www.kenziebok.com, or contact me directly at (617) 910-0655 or kenzie@kenziebok.com. I hope to earn your vote on Tuesday, September 24.**

My experience growing up in Boston

My sister and brother and I grew up in Bay Village, next to Back Bay, with a whole network of adults looking out for us. Where "Mike & Patty's" is now, our neighbor Marcia ran "The Meeting Place" and frequently treated us to pancakes. Neighborhood planning meetings and block parties and street fairs were part of our cycle of seasons. Sometimes I watched our neighbor Richard tend our local garden. It was from him that I first learned that communal spaces don't stay beautiful by magic, and that there's a deep pride to be found in caring for your place and making it welcoming for others.

The city was my place. I played softball and learned to somersault at Hill House, hid beneath the Public Garden's umbrella trees, studied Boston's history at the public library, and sailed for \$1 a summer at Community Boating. With two parents working full-time, we took full advantage of every opportunity to keep a trio of city kids entertained.

I grew up with an especially strong sense that city neighborhoods are forged through the tireless work of their residents. My grandfather secured 74 Joy St. from the city for Hill House and Beacon Hill Nursery School, helped create our neighborhood historic districts, and got affordable housing built at places like the Blackstone Apartments in the West End and the Bowdoin School on Myrtle St. In the 1960s, my grandmother went door-to-door asking her neighbors to swap out their coal furnaces to improve local air quality. My father helped find a home for transitional housing in Bay Village in the 1980s, while my mother focused on supporting the Pine Street Inn's efforts to end homelessness.

What drew me to local politics

My own political activism began early: as a teenager I campaigned for John Kerry and Deval Patrick and Sonia Chang-Diaz. I attended college at Harvard, which allowed me to teach Civics each week in the Boston Public Schools. During college I interned in 2008 for the Obama for America campaign and then in 2010 at the White House.

The same day I started my White House internship, I learned that one of my 14-year-old Civics students had been the victim of a fatal shooting. Though I was working in one of the world's most powerful places that summer, I felt helpless. I yearned to be home to join the anti-violence efforts sparked by his death. I also felt the travesty of teaching students to be active citizens at age 18 when too many don't make it to that age. I knew then that I would devote myself to making Boston a safe place for all children to flourish.

After college, I won a Marshall scholarship to go to Cambridge, England to earn my PhD in the history of political thought. I studied the history of ideas about what it means to have a just society, reach democratic decisions, and promote the public good. These studies further reinforced what I already knew as an engaged young person – that a community that believes in the power of collective action can achieve incredible things.

My work to build a better Boston

When I came back home, I participated in that power of collective action firsthand. I saw Boston's urgent need to address affordability at every level – whether middle-income affordable homeownership or cooperatives or low-income rental housing—so I and a group of others began to strategize about passing the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to raise funds for affordable housing, parks, and historic preservation. We met with the city councilors to get the measure on the ballot, then organized a major citywide campaign. I trained hundreds of volunteers and talked to thousands of voters about the measure. In November 2016, the voters approved the question with a 74% yes vote.

I was honored to draft the CPA implementation ordinance, and in just the past two years we've seen an extra \$42 million enable important projects. In our district, for example, CPA is funding the restoration of the Vilna Shul and Old West Church, the design of a real park at Charlesgate – where Storrow Drive ramps have frustrated Olmsted's vision for so long – and the construction of artist housing on Mission Hill. I'm proud to see all our hard work come to fruition; it shows how we have the power to organize to change the city for the better. And it shows that we can't be afraid to take on big efforts – like securing a new source of revenue – when that is the path to achieving our goals.

Since 2016, I've been immersed in the policy side of how we make the city better. I served as Budget Director to At-Large Councilor Annissa Essaibi-George, reading and analyzing the whole city budget in the process. We focused on equity in our Boston Public Schools budget and funding social supports for our students, especially the thousands of homeless students in BPS. We also advocated for a full-time nurse in every school – a demand that has finally been realized in the latest BPS contract.

I then went to work at the Boston Housing Authority, where I've focused on strategies to preserve deeply affordable units despite federal disinvestment. I'm very proud that, as one result of my efforts, the city put \$30 million in the capital budget for public housing preservation for the first time this April. That money will help preserve these units while freeing up other affordable housing funds for other parts of a healthy housing ecosystem. I've also worked on resident organizing and robust language access, since you can't have a city for all unless all voices are heard. For that reason, when I teach my weekly Harvard seminar on Justice in Housing, I always teach my undergrad students to look closely and ask whose rights and interests tend to frame our conversations about what's possible.

Why I'm running for City Council

Boston is the city that raised me and taught me what it means to be part of a great community. So I'm committed to addressing our challenges in order to make the Boston we love as strong and inclusive as possible. We **can** have a city with homes for people from all walks of life, through smart and ambitious affordable housing programs and the judicious use of public land. We **can** move people around more safely and efficiently, through improving our public transit infrastructure and better protecting pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers from dangerous conflicts on our streets. We **can** have great schools and great job opportunities for our youth, and an end to gun violence. And we **can** make Boston a model of how to tackle climate change, by changing our energy sources and curbing emissions and making our city infrastructure more resilient.

These are the types of systems-level changes that I want to help lead as our city councilor. But I also want to do the job because it involves daily attention to the block-by-block fabric of the city – to making every corner a safe one, and helping neighbors have a real voice in development, and supporting the care of our beloved parks and public spaces. This is what I learned from my family and my neighbor Richard: everything starts with tending the neighborhood garden.

To tend those gardens, we need stable communities. We must make it possible for families to stay in the city. I loved growing up in a neighborhood that included lawyers and house painters, Chinese elders and LGBTQ+ activists, and I want to fight for that sort of community. Keeping families in the city requires affordability, my career focus so far. It also requires deep attention to the Boston Public Schools – both to improving schools across the system and to giving BPS more of a foothold in our district, where currently the lack of public elementary schools exacerbates the pressure on families to leave.

Having watched my own grandmother age in place, I also know the challenges our seniors face in staying in the neighborhoods they have helped to build. We must be proactive in figuring out how to invest in both the physical and social infrastructure to best support our elderly residents. And we can't afford to let our seniors on fixed incomes get priced out – whether through the shocking age-based evictions we've seen in Kenmore recently, or the steady creep of unaffordable property tax bills.

I'm running for city council because building and preserving our communities requires a tireless, creative advocate in this role. It requires someone who loves the district, who has brought people together to strengthen our communities, who knows how to be effective at the city level, and who can take a wider view on the challenges and opportunities that Boston faces. I want to be that councilor for District 8: for every resident of Mission Hill, Fenway, Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Audubon Circle, Kenmore, and the West End.

If you've made it to the end of this letter, I know you care about the future of our community as much as I do. **Again, I humbly ask for your vote on Tuesday, September 24.**

Sincerely,



Kenzie Bok

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P.S. Visit my website, KenzieBok.com, to learn more and find out how you can help our campaign.