



CANDIDATE NAME: Andrew Zarro

• What actions should the City Council take to support local businesses amid the coronavirus crisis? How would you ensure the council pursues these actions?

Prioritizing our local economy is essential as we navigate our way through Covid19.

Without government assistance (Federal & State), we will continue to see doors close. It hasn't been until recent that we have seen the City Council begin an attempt at assistance locally owned small businesses with the recent extension of outdoor seating, free PPE, and the winterized grant. Here are some ideas I will advocate for as a Councilor:

1) Work with the Maine Dept. of Economic Development, the City of Portland and organizations like PBL to allocate Cares Act funding to residents in the form of a gift card that can only be used at local businesses. It has been done in Vermont and could successfully be replicated here.

2) Advocate for an evocation freeze and rent hike freeze on all commercial leases. If a business is experiencing undue burden from Covid and cannot pay their rent, we have an obligation to support them (their employees/community) by protecting them from an eviction.

3) Expand the funding through the GPCOG Loan Program to Portland, focusing on helping businesses with 1-10 employees.

4) Increase the frequency and access to PPE and Covid testing. Make sure small businesses have access to PPE multiple times a week through the City and setup consistent Covid testing sites to allow customer-facing businesses access to testing.

When it comes to persuading the council to support these measures the answer is clear — how many small and locally owned businesses have already closed their doors in Portland? These are our neighbors, friends and constituents and they are in desperate need from their Municipal government.



Outside of the immediate needs of the pandemic, what three things would you work on that would help local businesses in Portland? How would this work alleviate the challenges local businesses currently face?

- **Zoning:** I would advocate to rezone portions of the city (mostly downtown) where large commercial spaces are either left vacant or zoned for use that only large retailers and chains can afford. We need to incentivize local small businesses to open in Portland, and one way of doing that is by creating access to spaces that are leasable for a multitude of mix use businesses.
- **Technical Assistance:** One of the greatest investments the City has made in businesses here in Portland is the ongoing relationship with Portland Downtown. They are able to provide technical assistance and services to businesses, property owners and residents through that partnership. This financial investment shows the value the city places in that district. Portland Buy Local should be no different. I would work with PBL and advocate for a similar funding structure where the organization would have the ability to amplify its work throughout the city. This funding could come from any number of revenue sources including: city business licenses & permits, TIF, etc. Small local businesses are exhausted after we work all day everyday. While we might have the occasional burst to do something extra, the support, advocacy and technical assistance provided from an adequately funded PBL would open a world of opportunity and growth for Portland's local economy.
- **Financing:** Micro and small business grants/no interest loans are paramount to promoting equity in small and locally owned business formation. This is especially true for minority owned businesses. BIPOC-owned, Women-owned, LGBTQ+ Owned, Immigrant Owned — we need to be investing in the people in our communities that want to contribute to the local economy. If we were able to redirect funding (start-up, growth, operations) to the hyper local businesses that live the Buy Local values, we would immediately reap the benefits from it as a city. How would this alleviate the challenges



we face?

- 1) For every \$100 you spend at locally owned businesses, \$68 will stay in the community. For that same \$100 at a national chain, only \$43 stays in the community.
- We would maintain and even grow our diversity in minority-owned businesses, elevating cultural and social capital in Portland.
- Create local jobs that pay well and care for employees.
- Foster Portland as a destination AND a place to live/work.
- Directly impact the affordable housing crisis we are facing in Portland.

What are your thoughts on the minimum wage referendum that would raise the minimum wage in Portland to \$15/hour?

I do this every day with my employees at Little Woodfords and live my values. I am proof that you can successfully own and operate a small business while paying your employees a livable wage, offering health insurance and 48 hours paid sick time.

Portland can and should be the national leader in high road economic development policies that promote a healthy local economy while lifting everyone up with it.

How do local, independent businesses contribute to the vitality and strength of Maine's communities? Do franchises and chains offer the same value to Maine's communities?

I answered a lot of this accidentally two questions ago, but investing in high road local economic development, we would alleviate so much of the pressure we are currently feeling AND quickly reverse those issues. Small businesses are often referenced as the backbone of America, and in many ways I agree with that sentiment specific to Maine's economy. So much of a Portland's identity is associated with the makeup of our locallyowned

businesses. Portland is a beacon for other cities who aspire to have such a



vibrant and nationally recognized city filled with locally-owned and operated shops supported by year-round residents. The Portland City Council has been prodevelopment for quite some time, but that's not the answer. We need a council that is pro local business. Pro sustainable business. Pro equitable business opportunity for micro businesses and minority entrepreneurs who have additional barriers to entry in the market. Economic development of today and tomorrow is the triple bottom line — social, environmental and financial impact promoting a local economy that strengthens all of Portland's neighborhoods and enhances the quality of life for everyone, not just a small few. We need accessible programming that will help usher in a new generation of diverse small business owners that will lift our city up. Local governments have an important role in economic development. Our council should promote economic development strategies that attract and build a stable sustainable local economy, not development for the sake of development. What good is our city if it's completely developed and none of us can live, work or open a shop here?

- I do not believe franchises and chains offer the same type of value to Maine's economy. Money is less likely to stay in the local economy, jobs are less likely to be up to par with what we should be offering, stakeholders/owners don't live in the community, many costs are externalized onto the environment, and there is less cultural connection to the local community. I think the occasional "friend-chise" is alright for a city like Portland, but we need to be elevating and protecting small locally owned businesses now before it's too late. The issues we are facing existed before Covid — if anything, Covid exposed what was already squeezing us out.

The City Manager is pursuing spending cuts and layoffs due to the budget shortfall caused by the pandemic. Which departments or programs do you think are most acceptable to be the focus of spending cuts? What is one department or program for which you would be unwilling to approve spending cuts?

- This has obviously changed now the the FY21 budget was approved. In light of the



Black Lives Matter movement this summer and the significant public support, I believe the Portland Police Department should have a percentage of their budget reallocated to other city services including, conflict resolution specialists, community centers, addiction and recovery services. I would not be willing to cut the Sustainability Department, which sadly has one full time and one part time position. Fighting climate change and prioritizing a sustainable municipal government is a top issue of my campaign. We need to be using every tool in our toolbox in the fight against climate change. Every decision we make at the municipal level needs to be made with future generations in mind. No idea is too small when it comes to fighting climate change. Here are some tangible green policy initiatives I see for Portland:

- 1. Municipal curbside composting.
- 2. A fully-funded Sustainability Department intertwined with every other city department.
- 3. A ban on single-use plastics, and an incentive on compostable single-use disposables.
- 4. A carbon offset fee on mega-polluters like cruise ships, for their pollution of our water and our air.

Rising real estate prices have impacted both commercial and residential rents.

● a) As commercial rents have increased, local businesses are being pushed out of Portland, and chains are moving in. What policies would you pursue that could help alleviate this problem?

○ Don't I know it! As a small business who was faced with greedy commercial landlords spiking my shops rent in the middle of a global pandemic, I know the sting of this issue in Portland. My business is a success story for a shop that opened in a fringe neighborhood and was powered by community and a heavy focus on the local economy. We cannot sit idly as our small and local businesses



are being mistreated, forgotten and extinguished by greed and inadequate public policy. Like I mentioned in earlier questions, I think a combination of an emergency freeze on commercial evictions, rezoning of larger-footprint store fronts into smaller & more accessible use, and a robust PBL advocacy organization in partnership with the City is the trifecta that will reinvigorate our local economy. Additionally, I think we can easily incentivize commercial property owners to lease to local businesses by offering a % reduction in annual property tax if they choose to rent to a local business over a chain. We can do hard things if we set our minds to it and work together to create inclusive and effective public policy that protects our local economy and prioritizes high road economic development practices.

b) Availability of affordable middle-market housing is critical to support a robust small-business community - for both owners and employees. How do you plan to address the critical shortage of affordable market-rate housing for the "missing middle" in the City?

- Currently, Portland and South Portland are being touted as being among the “hottest” real estate markets in the country — and that comes with a steep social price tag. Moderate as well as low wage individuals and families are being squeezed out of the rental markets as well as from the prospects of home ownership. A new look at a master plan that makes room for people at all ends of the economic strata has to be an immediate priority.
- First, affordable housing needs to be thought of in the lens of living wages. Studies have shown that renters working 40 hours a week and earning minimum wage can afford a typical two-bedroom apartment (i.e., not be cost-burdened) in exactly ZERO counties nationwide. We need to raise Portland’s minimum wage to \$15/hour! Additionally, I believe affordable housing access requires a multipronged approach.



- Here are a few ideas:
 - Couple city tax credits and payments with state and federal housing programs, focusing specifically on reputable local developers, wherever possible. This includes using Brownfield sites for development to maximize public benefits.
 - Increase the quantity and affordability of “affordable units” required by inclusionary zoning. This includes looking at what data we use to determine the median incomes, excluding the more affluent communities outside of Portland.
 - We need to continue changing zoning laws to allow for more high-density projects at the council level. Inclusionary zoning is key!
 - To promote Aging in Place for our older neighbors, let’s create a City homestead exemption for folks who have lived in their home for 10+ years at a time to alleviate the increase in property taxes to folks on fixed incomes. They have invested in our communities for decades and we should invest in them as they age.
- Affordable housing is also a transportation issue. We have a city that is still very focused on cars over public transit. We need to focus on increasing the availability of safe, reliable and expansive public transit and rethink our building laws that require a minimum number of parking spots in high density neighborhoods to allow for more housing units to be built in any given project. We need think of the above in the context of rentals AND home ownership, as ownership is a big part of the American Dream, and plays a key part in upward mobility for many of us.
- Here’s an idea! What if the City of Portland offered a property tax break as incentive to not increase rent above a certain percentage per year? If most Landlords took advantage of this, the City would lose tax revenue; however, tenants would have lesser rent and the local economy would get a significant boost, therefore benefitting the City in the long run. If Landlords chose to ignore

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that option and increased the rent, then the City gets an increase in tax revenue.

It's a win-win.

- Affordable housing will play a huge part in helping us ensure Portland remains a community we can all be a part of.