



CANDIDATE NAME: Dr. Laura Kelley

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

The most important action the city council can take to support local businesses amid the coronavirus crisis is to increase accessibility and speed of COVID-19 testing because the health capacity of our workforce, local customers, visitors, and the level of virus in Maine are the greatest threat to our local economy at this moment. Being able to test and get results rapidly is the key to controlling the spread of the virus AND keeping us going, and it represent the greatest delta for buoying us through the pandemic until we have a reliable vaccine + effective distribution of that vaccine. Right now there are 4 testing sights in Portland and only one that does not require an appointment. Anyone who suspects they might be sick, first has to get an appointment which might take a day, then they have to wait 3-4 days for results. This is crippling to our economy, to schools, to our lives. The solution is low barrier, accessible, rapid tests. They exist. We need them. This would be a day one agenda item for me.

Beyond testing, the city council can do the following things right now:

- Facilitate finding and funding local logistics solvers and vendors for options that increase businesses' ability to provide curbside/outside/modified service to their customers.
- Support above solutions determined by businesses to meet needs to provide curbside/outside/modified services by being proactive and open-minded about parking, snow removal, traffic solutions.
- INVEST IN PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION initiatives RIGHT NOW that keep our community safe, healthy, and prepared to buoy our local economy as best we can right now and as we emerge from the pandemic.
- Cooperate with Maine CDC guidelines and support businesses in all efforts to comply including helping find funding for needed PPE, accommodations, etc.
- Take an all-hands-on-deck approach to finding solutions and funding them for businesses. Public, private, and philanthropic collaboration right now is needed.
- Make needed changes to land use codes and begin work that creates jobs building to meet our needs.



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?

From the level of the city council, things that can be done to propel local business are:

- **Inspired Infrastructure Design:** We need inspired urban planning and design in our city and we need to look beyond the focus of band-aid solutions for parking spaces and false narratives about preservation. Portland has everything to offer. Putting innovative, sustainable, thoughtful city planning into effect in Portland is essential to solving some of our biggest challenges like climate change and the need for housing AS WELL AS a driver for our local economy. People flock to Portland by cruise ships and airplanes just to dine in our restaurants and look at our ocean views. Asking and answering which additions to our city would amplify the experience individuals have when they live, work, and visit Portland represents not only how to solve problems but, more importantly, how to build community, how to improve our quality of life, and actually how to make Portland sustainable in every way. This work should be done by experts together with local stakeholders. It's work that has to be done. Anything less is selling ourselves short. And building consensus around this need, the opportunity to create a shared vision, and the importance of finding the courage to invest in and manifest smart design is paramount to bolstering local businesses. Specific infrastructure solutions should be guided by reliable information and collaboration among stakeholders with special attention to meeting needs and goals. Diverse, sustainable, and accessible transportation options from ferry, to rail, to pedestrian-friendly designs make cities user-friendly and welcoming; they bring people to the doors of our local businesses as well as improve quality of life for residents. Combining transportation designs with biomass installations adds beauty, carbon-trapping capacity, flood protection, and supports the wild-life like birds and bees that assist us in growing the food we need to fill plates in our restaurants, home kitchens, and school cafeterias. The new school of technology and the promise of a new medical school on the horizon create a layer of workforce preparedness and sustainability key to supporting the precise kind of growth our city can benefit the most from because it serves the needs of our population as well as contributing to the local economy. Complimenting that growth with assets directly related to increasing community well-being - arts, including performing arts, and entertainment venues especially ones that serve dual purposes by including opportunity for youth and community participation and education as well as community spaces - parks, trails, etc. Again - all of this should be guided by community input with the understanding that change can enhance and strengthen and improve and we should embrace smart, thoughtful, meaningful change.
- **Workforce Investment through education, opportunity, health and well-being:** Imperative to a robust local economy and strong local businesses is the strength of our workforce. I am a literacy advocate with deep understanding about the impact of having nearly 2/3 of people in our community who do not read proficiently and 1/3 who do not have basic reading skills. Low literacy costs the U.S. more than \$250 BILLION, and that is JUST through the lens of our workforce. Adding the impact of low literacy on poverty,



healthcare, incarceration, mental illness, addiction, etc. brings that total into the trillions of dollars. We can solve this issue by changing the way we teach people to read. If we change the way we teach people to read, over 90% of people can learn to read. Education and opportunities for students to pursue their passions in education - opportunities that are broadened by our community education partners - bolster the capacity of our local workforce and benefit our local economy. Equally important is the health and well-being of our population - the health and well-being of every individual in Portland and beyond. Investment in public health and healthcare initiatives that keep people and their families healthy makes our community healthy and keeps our businesses running smoothly and people employed. It also raises the level of contributions in creativity and innovation when people are well and do their best work. It is crucial to make investments to ensure that children, families, and our communities have what they need to be healthy and well. Health and well-being fuels prosperity.

- Consensus building: Policies cannot change society. We have to do that work together. We need leaders who are skilled in building consensus by helping people see the expansive common ground that exists. We need people who are courageous enough to put their foot down on the facts, the knack for redirecting people from the sound bites that distract us from the work we have never done - work aimed at solving the roots of our problems - and who have the discipline AND knowledge to bring reliable data-driven solutions to our most pressing problems. What is required to do that work AND is what is MISSING presently in Portland are people who can build consensus. I know how to do that work. I've been doing it for decades.

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

I am against the referendum for several reasons. First of all, Maine already has a minimum wage policy that has led to an increase in minimum wage by \$1/year each of the last three years and will continue to increase the minimum wage yearly with cost of living increases. There is not a reason to jump ahead of that right now, especially at this moment when so many of our local businesses are already out on a limb. I am aware that the \$15 won't kick in until 2024, I still think that it will be damaging at this moment for businesses because of the impact it will have on their ability to withstand the risks and pressures that are upon them - in other words, this is not the time for this discussion from a wellness point of view. **More importantly, the emergency multiplier is too ill-defined and not sustainable for too many businesses.** Furthermore, the policy was written by unknown, unelected individuals outside the public forum. There is a reason we don't write policy that way. Who is accountable to this policy? What is it's goal? How will we measure it's success or failure? It is uninformed, ill-conceived, and irresponsible. In this election cycle the referendum process - a vital part of Maine's heritage of strong citizens' rights - has been abused by a faction of individuals who do not represent a majority opinion and who have not done their due diligence to understand what kind of impact their policies would have. I have heard from their ranks an alarming lack of understanding of the actual impact of some of the



things they have written. I believe this would shutter local businesses yet do nothing at all to businesses like Whole Foods which already pays its employees \$15/hour...Whole Foods/Amazon is actually an unsustainable business model that harms our economy and well-being. Wealth inequality cannot be solved locally and the solution for the person with a masters degree working a minimum wage job who wants to make more money is not to increase minimum wage it is to provide a better job by creating the need for good jobs...and that can stem from investing in infrastructure and climate goals.

We can solve wealth inequality with: tax reform at the federal level; improving education, health, and well-being of our work-force; and creating jobs.

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?

Small businesses, family owned businesses, locally owned and operated businesses are essential to a sustainable economy. For too long, politicians have perpetuated the idea of unlimited economic growth and development as a mark of our strength and progress and viability. But, in truth, there are no systems that exist in nature in which perpetual growth is sustainable. None. In fact, when growth continues without check in any system, the requirements became so great that the system consumes its own resources and collapses...from a doctor's perspective, this is what cancer looks like.

Small businesses are a model for a better direction for our economy - a direction that is in line with increasing our overall health and well-being. The reason for that is that small businesses, family owned businesses, locally owned and operated businesses are deeply rooted in their communities. They are invested in the people and the place. They help build the foundation. Their employees are neighbors who are known and valued as are their families and their circumstances. Local businesses contribute to schools and road maintenance and air and water quality through local taxes and practices. And most importantly, they reach a point at which things work well, their employees are treated well, their quality of life in the community is good and they stay there and contribute to well-being that extends beyond their walls spilling out into the youth sports teams and performing arts they support and the employees homes where a share of prosperity helps build other lives - and when they reach this point they're satisfied. Growth from this point might not register in a statistic to sell to voters to create a facade of economic strength, but is this not a reflection of the strength of a community? In my opinion, we need to change our tools of measuring success. Key to that change is the model that small businesses provide us. It's why I say that all policy is health policy - because from that perspective we begin to reshape our thinking about what our local economy should look like. We have some wonderful local chains and franchises - things that meet demands for expanding opportunities to employees or growing family. Models that work because they are entrenched in our local culture and values. I support that kind of chain or franchise.



But I think the model of Whole Foods/Amazon types of chains and franchises is deeply flawed and part of the root of so many bad end outcomes. I offer this specific example: When COVID-19 hit, ferry service was severely stricter to the islands, travel was only for essential workers, and folks were fearful. Islanders, of course, are not a monolithic populations. We have elderly islanders, people with underlying medical issues that are severe and debilitating, we have essential workers, etc. People's lives were impacted in many ways. Folks went without medical care they needed and it was challenging to get food.

Whole Foods - which is one of only a few vendors that allows online ordering and island delivery - shut down their island delivery service to new island customers. If you didn't already have an account (likely b/c it's too pricey) you were out of luck. It was the local vendors - Legion Square Market in SoPo; Rosemont Market, Lois' Natural, Gulf of Maine Sashimi, Lady Catherine Lobster, Market Street Eats, etc. - These were the businesses that sent food to the islands - these were the people that had folks' backs fixing meals for hospital workers and feeding schoolchildren.

So, no, the great big franchises and chains....they unequivocally do not offer the same value to Maine communities. Not even close!

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 is a big picture question and the best answer I can give is about process. First of all, as COVID-19 makes very clear, it's not possible to predict which variables will be most important in any given fiscal year. And second, my method will always be to consider the impact to community health and well-being. For that reason, whatever decisions are made, I am always going to be looking for measured impact in order to understand whether our decisions did what we intended, to what degree, and to look for the unintended outcomes, as well. I don't have a "never this department" philosophy because I know that kind of hard-line attitude is a fallacious one. You have to be ready to do what is needed. Posturing and grand-standing and saying you know what is best doesn't serve the greater good. What I promise to do is to be informed, to be forward thinking, to be courageous, and to be accountable.



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?**

This has to be guided by the people of Portland. When I talk about building consensus around common ground, this is the kind of issue that needs that level of community work. Does Portland want to be a city that does not have national chains? Maybe not on the peninsula? Can we write nuanced tax policy that captures a greater amount of taxes from national chains and use it to subsidize small businesses? Can we write policy that affects the real estate part of the equation to make it more affordable to small businesses?

There are solutions to every equation. This I know. As an outsider, it's hard to know which solutions will have the greatest impact AND not create new problems. Whether we are talking about solutions for people experiencing homelessness, a historical district designation, or keeping Portland affordable for local businesses, the approach has to begin with more information gathering and conversations. This campaign has taught me that communication and transparency are missing from our community as much as vision and courage are missing from our leaders. We need more honest conversations, more attention to meeting needs and getting as many wants as possible without negative impacts, and more attention to empirical data - that can help us shed our preconceived notions and see things as they are and not as we assume they are or as we wish them to be. This is how responsible policies are developed.

- 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?**

We need more housing in Portland. People want a stronger economy, to keep Portland affordable, make it more accessible, for us to reach goals toward mitigating climate change, AND for nothing to change about the way the city looks. Those things are incompatible and we have to elect leaders who are ready to talk about that. Portland does not have a parking problem. Portland has a leadership problem.

In 2020 we have decades worth of reliable information on how to do things better. It's time for us to put information to use for the benefit of our community. We have to preserve what is essential about Portland - respectfully and responsibly - while we make progress toward the kind of meaningful actions that will propel us toward prosperity. We need affordable housing that meets a range of needs. Not all needs are met by stacked housing on the peninsula. Families want to look outside and see their children playing in a yard. We need literacy and education initiatives along with opportunities for students to prepare for the jobs of the future. We need public health and healthcare initiatives directed at helping people increase their health and well-being. And we need to take meaningful action to mitigate climate change. We need affordable housing along with accessible and green transportation options, as discussed above. All of these things can be accomplished on a more timely manner and with greater guidance from experts and with



more voices heard. Someone just needs to put in the time and be ready to help people get involved in a positive and productive way. We also need to recognize what can be achieved locally versus what must be done at the state and federal level. The larger piece of many solutions has to come from the work of our state and federal legislators. Again, it is why quantifying our needs as specifically as possible yields good results because it strengthens the case our representatives can make on our behalf. Finally, creative innovating partnerships with public, private, and philanthropic sources to meet needs in neighborhoods and for underserved populations can ease the burden on taxpayers and has not been optimized in Portland.