



CANDIDATE NAME: MARK N. DION

City Council

- What actions should the City Council take to support local businesses amid the coronavirus crisis?
 1. The Council should consider relaxing recurring municipal fees imposed on small businesses
 2. Reduce parking fees
 3. Coordinate securing federal relief dollars with our legislative delegation to ensure our small business economy gets its fair share

- How would you ensure the council pursues these actions?

We need to build an active consensus on the Council that small business is the bedrock of our city economy. The Council must exercise individual and collective leadership that will move the policy process toward concrete outcomes. We can't always kill good policy in hopes of getting a perfect policy in place.

- Outside of the immediate needs of the pandemic, what three things would you work on that would help local businesses in Portland?

I will do what I can to reinforce the idea that we are a city of neighborhoods and that the value-added anchor to those neighborhoods are small businesses. Neighborhoods work best when they are grounded by a small business "center" as the hub of that neighborhood. To accomplish that we need to be more creative in our zoning and licensing strategies.

How would this work alleviate the challenges local businesses currently face?

By being open minded to understanding the economic issues those business owners face and addressing solutions that they believe will address those challenges. Being a council member is not a guarantee that I am the smartest person in the room instead I should be wise enough to act on the advice offered by those who personally confront the business challenges of the day.

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

I believe that minimum wage is a state policy issue and not a question for a local government. I will vote No on the proposed referendum. Economic activity and labor costs don't stay neatly within the confines of a city's boundary. Mandated wage adjustments need to be carefully considered by a state legislature as they are not easily absorbed by businesses trying to manage overhead costs over the long term.
- 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?

Local businesses, by their very nature, dig deeper roots in the community than franchises or chains. Local businesses provide a unique identity and a level of commitment to our community



that is outside and apart from the good neighbor formula common to national chains. While there is room for both approaches, we should exercise a conscious preference in promoting and sustaining home grown business enterprises.

- 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?

“Acceptable” is a shortcut to stating the problem of how we decide what we *need* a City to do in contrast to what we *want* a City to do. Short term budget reductions sidestep that difficult debate with the possibility that staff can do as much (if not more) with fewer resources.

What is one department or program for which you would be unwilling to approve spending cuts?

The core responsibility of a local government is to create a safe environment for us to raise our families and pursue our own dreams for success. That said, public safety, represented by fire, police and emergency medical services, has to occupy the center of our budget considerations. These services protect and sustain the quality of our city environment and provides a stable base for all other social and business activity to advance forward.

- 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?

We need to advance a zoning strategy that protects the interests of our local business economy and individual neighborhood identities from penetration by formula/chain stores. One possible solution would be to create special use zoning conditions that limit the potential presence of these entities in certain districts within the city.

- 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?

I believe that zoning reform focused on recalculating the type and density of housing units could go a long way to increasing the overall access to affordable housing. Moreover, creating intentional, mixed use housing stock on a given geography could prompt a more diverse economic population of tenants and homeowners which can lead to a more vital and resilient neighborhood.