

WARD E Council Candidate Survey Q&A



Rebecca Symes



James Solomon



Jake Hudnut



Nicholas J Grillo



Madeleine Giansanti Cag

QUESTION #1

In 2016, JC Open Data shows that there were 585 pedestrians struck by vehicles, a 3% increase over 2015 and a 12% increase over 2014, and the problem is equally chronic in every part of the city. Traffic safety enforcement has long been inconsistent at best and not a true priority, and our roads have become dangerous speedways. What will you do, if elected, to make this public health crisis a top priority for improvement for the next administration? (Source: JC Open Data, tinyurl.com/peddashboard)

ANSWERS

Rebecca Symes - A Traffic Safety Working Group, drawing relevant Jersey City government departments together to collaborate on traffic safety, has been formed. Safe Streets JC and Bike JC's community organizing played an important role in this exciting development. When the community has a say, we get more of the things that matter most (and, targeted focus on traffic safety is no exception!). That is why the cornerstone of my campaign is passing laws that give residents and community groups a role in planning the future of Jersey City and determining how our tax dollars are spent. I will be an active member of the coalition working to improve traffic safety and champion necessary policy changes identified through this government-community partnership.

James Solomon - Fighting for safe streets is life and death. It will be a top priority. In fact, it already has been a top priority of my campaign. I am the only Ward E candidate who has pointed to specific intersections and infrastructure that should be changed such as the administration's failure to reinstall the pedestrian safety bollards at 1st & Erie for over 8 months. Moving forward, I commit to the following.

- A focus on enforcement. Right now pedestrian safety is not a major priority for our police force.
- A focus on engineering. Enforcement, by definition, is inconsistent. Engineering is permanent.
- Building a political movement for Safe Streets. Political organizing delivers change and I will aid and assist ongoing organizing efforts.

Jake Hudnut - Enforcement is, unfortunately, a scarce resource. First, we can combat this fact with better roadway design. Put simply, bad roadway design fosters bad driving. Tighter turn radii, wider crosswalks, traffic calming, investments in signal timing, and other modern urban street design initiatives would be a top priority for me as Councilman and would encourage safer driving. Second, I would advocate for more resources toward enforcement.

Nicholas J Grillo - Increased enforcement is a must!! In addition, I think reducing the speed limit on many of the smaller neighborhood streets would help. In reality, a comprehensive traffic study is needed for Ward E to help identify chronic problem areas.

Madeleine Giansanti Cag - At this time in our city with fast development/stalled infrastructure, traffic safety enforcement needs to be a priority—our population growing & more people are also coming to JC either for entertainment or as a throughway—leading to more congested roads. Even more hazardous, often people on the roads are unfamiliar w/JC. I will make street safety a top priority and find the most dangerous spots by talking with civic and neighborhood associations. They are active and need to have more city support. I will work with the Police Department to get JC Police Bike Patrol to monitor those areas. We can also use walking patrols along certain blocks. Having more public officials out of cars and on bikes and walking will improve roadway safety.

QUESTION #2

In 2011, the Council adopted a "Complete Streets" policy, which calls for design improvements on our streets to more fully accommodate road users of all ages and abilities more safely and allow access by all modes of transport (including bicycles and pedestrians). Complete Streets policies reduce speeds to within safe, existing limits and can improve traffic flow. However, this policy has yet to be enacted, citizens continue to get hurt or killed, and our auto insurance rates keep rising. Will you commit to making the application of Complete Streets policy a priority during your term, if elected? How?

ANSWERS

Rebecca Symes - Absolutely. People's lives are at stake. The 2011 Complete Streets policy was a commitment to streets that are safer for all. However, a commitment to complete streets is only the first step. During my term, I will amend the 2011 Complete Streets policy so that it includes clear guidelines for implementation, requirements for oversight, and benchmarks to track our progress. There are many examples we can learn from and partners to engage in how we bring Complete Streets to Jersey City. The non-profit, non-partisan National Complete Streets Coalition, is one of the preeminent facilitators of these programs, and would be one of several potential partners to help us draft new legislation.

James Solomon - Jersey City's "Complete Streets" policy is a joke. It is an example of what happens when we elect politicians without a genuine commitment to safe streets. Every single time a road is repaved or reconstructed, it should be redesigned as a complete street, either now or in the future. This should occur as part of a citywide plan to transition to safer road engineering over the next decade. As a councilperson, I will request reports (as is within my power) to track progress on the policy's implementation. I will publicize the results of those reports, regardless of who is offended.

Jake Hudnut - Yes, I would commit to making Complete Street a priority as Councilman. But I would be one voice; an education campaign informing residents of the advantages of Complete Street policies would in turn put more pressure on my fellow elected City officials to implement the policies. I would also advocate that we go farther than Complete Street policies, and additionally draw from recommendations put out by the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) for urban street design.

Nicholas J Grillo - The facts show that complete streets do actually work. I am overall supportive of them providing the overwhelming majority of my constituents support it. Working with the other council members and administration is key to implementing these changes.

Madeleine Giansanti Cag - I am disappointed at the soft language it is aspirational, but has no teeth; no wonder after 6 yrs nothing has been done. I believe in Complete Streets and will do more than sign a resolution (& forget about it) to achieve improvements. NJDOT adopted Complete Streets in 09; there are successful examples around the state that we can learn from. I will make road diets a priority. I support an overhaul of Grand (which is in planning). I will evaluate the proposals & strongly support a comprehensive redesign that takes into account current volume and increased traffic expectations. I will also propose similar assessments and modification for other problem roads, starting with Columbus (wide enough to have barrier bike lanes) and Marin (a mess)

QUESTION #3

The streets in Jersey City are generally not bike friendly and are dangerous to ride on. The bike lanes we do have are not connected in a network, nor are they enforced (often blocked by double parking, etc.). We have no protected bike lanes and lack sufficient racks at key transit and shopping hubs. What would you do to improve safety and access for bicycle riders throughout the entire city?

ANSWERS

Rebecca Symes - Creating a network of safe bike lanes, some of them protected, will benefit drivers, pedestrians, and riders. If residents feel they can safely navigate our streets by bike, they are more likely to use bikes to travel within JC. That means less cars on the road, reducing congestion for those who must drive. It also keeps bicycles off the sidewalks, where they don't belong, making it safer for pedestrians.

Improving intersections is vital. As a frequent pedestrian, occasional bike-rider, I feel most vulnerable at intersections. Creative ideas to make intersections safer abound, some designed by our very own residents. Participatory budgeting can seed important pilot projects, like making physical improvements to a dangerous intersection.

James Solomon - The City of Pittsburgh is of similar size and with a similar budget to Jersey City. Pittsburgh built 4 protected bike lanes in 4 months. The only thing holding us back is a lack of political will. Within the next 4 years, we should complete a network of protected bike lanes that connects downtown with the waterfront, LSP, and PATH. It should connect the rest of the city to downtown on key corridors, create a key north-south network from the Heights to JSQ to Greenville.

Building the political movement fighting for these changes citywide will be crucial to accomplishing this ambitious, but eminently reasonable agenda. As stated earlier, I will partner with existing groups to keep growing a movement in our city.

Jake Hudnut - Put simply, I support more bike lanes and better design. More bike lanes in the City means narrower car lanes, which fosters safer driving and reduces double parking. This is safer for bikers. (New bike lanes would need to take into account a more thorough, well-thought citywide network.) We would also need more police officers on bikes if we increase bike lanes, which is something I talk a lot about during my campaign when advocating for the implementation of community policing.

Nicholas J Grillo - I have always been a supporter Bike networks. I think we need to unify the biking network in JC and HC. With varying sizes of Streets it could be difficult to put protected bike lanes on some streets. For those, enforcement is key. I would also like to see an increased fine for double parked cars that are blocking bike lanes.

Madeleine Giansanti Cag - I ride my bike a lot and agree many roads are not safe. Bike lanes should be more than just paint. There should be a considered and known network of lanes so cars are aware of them and know what to expect; and bicyclists can have more confidence in the drivers. Having more police on bike patrol will help gain safety awareness for greater consensus. It will also curb the number of double parked cars – which is not enforced. I agree strongly to having sufficient bike racks – do you know where the bike rack for the Newport Mall is hidden? – it is a joke. How expensive can bike racks be? Developers should include them in front of their buildings especially if they created a building specifically without sufficient parking for their residents

QUESTION #4

“The truth about a city’s aspirations isn’t found in its vision. It’s found in its budget” – Brent Toderian. As a councilperson, what would you do to fund an expansion of Complete Street improvements to make our roads safer for all users?

ANSWERS

Rebecca Symes - A Complete Streets policy is not a one-size-fits-all solution for safer streets. Different locations present different challenges. I want our City to have the resources it needs to do large scale, long range planning that prioritizes not only complete streets, but also resiliency and sustainability, and creative placemaking. I propose to designate a set portion of the money collected through the regular operations of JC’s Dept of Housing, Economic Development & Commerce to be automatically re-invested in the planning, zoning, and enforcement functions of the agency. Implementing a Complete Streets policy is challenging, by dedicating resources that can not be diverted from this important focus, we will make our roads safer for everyone.

James Solomon - The Mayor proposes a budget. Increasing the budget requires a 2/3rds vote of the Council. Therefore, the best way for a single councilperson to have a major impact on the budget is through the tool of political organizing. Turning out hundreds of supporters to City Hall will influence the Mayor and the other councilpeople. One focus of those organizing efforts would be to budget the money for a complete streets team of planners and engineers. Such an office would not only make immediate impacts, but it would institutionalize safe street knowledge in the city for years to come.

Jake Hudnut - The power of paint! Many initial Complete Street expansions would just require paint, which wouldn’t be a great burden on the City budget. Beyond that, more complex initiatives should encourage us to create partnerships. New development should be required to help us implement Complete Streets. Also, continuing development citywide increases ratables, increasing the budget; in voting on the budget as a Councilman, Complete Streets would be a priority for me.

Nicholas J Grillo - After applying for any possible grants, I would lobby the other council members to commit to increased funding for complete street transformations.

Madeleine Giansanti Cag - I got a copy of the budget which I will read this weekend. I want to know the current costs of road maintenance (we don’t do enough). I want to understand where the tax \$ from new developments are going (granted there are abatements, but that doesn’t = \$0 tax revenue). As far as funding outside of our tax dollars, I plan to use at least a third of my city council salary (~\$35k/3) annually to fund initiatives that benefit the city. Those funds could be used for safer road initiatives too—send me a proposal when I am Councilwoman. I would also be willing to do a raffle to raise money for transportation organizations that benefit the city – how about 12 raffles (one a month) to give away the City Council Ward E parking spot for a month?

QUESTION #5

“If you plan cities for cars & traffic, you get cars & traffic. If you plan for people & places, you get people & places.” – Fred Kent. Reducing dependency on cars is important for the environment, for safer and more pleasant neighborhoods, and for residents who cannot or who choose not to have a car. As density continues to increase, how will you ensure that new development promotes multiple modes of transportation with better connectivity between neighborhoods and to the region?

ANSWERS

Rebecca Symes - I will rely on zoning and community benefit agreements to ensure that new development promotes car-sharing, safe bike travel, intra-city transportation, along with connections to transportations hubs leading to other regions.

James Solomon - I am opposed to 1 to 1 parking minimums. Such policies make housing less affordable and roads more crowded. A network of protected bike lanes connected to major transit hubs, as proposed earlier, will encourage more people to take alternatives to cars. I support implementing subsidized car sharing policies similar to Hoboken's. The number of cars registered in Hoboken has decreased by over 3,000 since the policy has been implemented.

Jake Hudnut - On this issue, I lead by example and have been “car-free in J.C.” since 2014. Going forward we need to build and develop with the aim of reducing dependency on cars. Car-share partnerships and dedicated spaces are an important first step. As for businesses and their employees in our City, we can borrow ideas from California's Parking Cash-Out program and implement it. Beyond that we need a strong commitment to public transportation and bike shares near public transportation hubs. In my campaign I speak regularly about expecting more from the Port Authority and advocating for better PATH service.

Nicholas J Grillo - This is a more complicated question then it seems. I think having new Development included easy, safe storage for Bikes will help but ppl will only feel safe biking if there is a safe, cohesive network of bike paths. We can't discount the automobile though, reality is, a certain percentage of ppl will need cars. New developments must require more off street parking. If this were the case from day 1, we could have put more bike lanes on smaller streets by eliminating parking on one side of the block.

Madeleine Giansanti Cag - I will look at the details of all the developments in Ward E and require public benefits for any variance or ask before granting permits. I will work with the city planner to create a new redevelopment plan that takes neighborhoods into consideration and takes into account our infrastructure reality. I will work with the NJ Innovation team to understand the initiatives for JC. As a forward thinker, I will look to other cities that experienced exponential growth and prioritize innovation and technology. I will look to universities and small innovation companies for ideas & initiatives. Even if they are not present day solutions, it is important to be aware of those innovations because one day the opportunity may arise to take advantage

QUESTION #6

Illegal, dangerous parking is not adequately enforced and often contributes to crashes and injuries to pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers alike. Parking Enforcement does not have sufficient staffing, training, or technology to adequately address violations, including dangerous illegal parking (blocked crosswalks, double parking, blocked bus stops, impaired sight lines with cars parked too close to corners, etc.). If elected, what will you do to increase capacity within the Parking Enforcement Division?

ANSWERS

Rebecca Symes - I will start by advocating for straightforward, inexpensive physical improvements to make it impossible for cars to park in crosswalks or too close to corners. To expand enforcement, we need to change our current parking policy. We need to make better use of existing public and private parking, implement changes to our parking policy to disincentivize street parking by visitors, and conduct a parking turnover study to draft a data-based parking policy that prioritizes current residents.

James Solomon - My work in Boston centered on how to make government more efficient and effective. First, the administration should create clear metrics by which to judge the performance of the parking authority. Next, the city needs a real IT department to help the Parking Authority collect and analyze the data required to properly guide their enforcement activities. I will fight for this in the budget. Finally, I will fight to include new technologies in the budget, such as electronic license plate readers, which would improve the efficiency of the parking authority. Simply put, we need to move our Parking Authority from the 19th century to the 21st century.

Jake Hudnut - Enforcement should pay for itself and, therefore, be a low burden on the City if done properly. Mayor Fulop's abolishment of the Parking Authority did not have the effect he promised us as enforcement is very poor right now. As Councilman I would push for more resources, better training, and modern technology for parking enforcement. Also, implementing Complete Streets should reduce violations (i.e., narrower car lanes reduces speeding and double parking).

Nicholas J Grillo - This is a necessity. We can hire more staff and make steeper fines to help pay for that increase in staff. Targeted zone endorsement may help too, by have random rolling enforcement zones so agents aren't scattered through the whole neighborhood everyday.

Madeleine Giansanti Cag - I want to get a better idea of what the parking enforcement division looks like. I want to know what tools and mandate they have for enforcement. I want to know which department is responsible for painting the yellow curbs so no one parks in front of site lines and how that department coordinates with Parking. I need to know how the department is comprised, who manages it and what is its mandate to know how I can support improvements from within.

QUESTION #7

Grand St. is one of the most dangerous streets in the city, and it is also a key artery filled with dense residential developments, shopping, schools, and other community facilities. Do you support the Grand Street Vision proposal to redesign dangerous Grand Street, including elements such as a road diet, pedestrian safety improvements, and protected/separated bike lanes? What will you do to ensure that the city's eventual plan for Grand St. is swift, bold, and comprehensive—not a watered-down patchwork compromised by its loudest opponents?

ANSWERS

Rebecca Symes - The Grand Street Study is getting community feedback on the redesign via neighborhood outreach and public meetings. I am in favor of requiring the community's input when big decisions are being made about our neighborhoods. It's why I proposed a legal framework to guarantee community-driven development.

All agree that Grand Street must be made safer and neighbors are passionately debating what is best for Grand Street. Community education is key for the success of the Grand Street Vision. Attending a training on Road Diets, I learned from experts that "road diets" lead to better traffic flow and reduced congestion. I will advocate for the best practices in planning streets that are safe for everyone, using all tools available.

James Solomon - I support the Grand St. Vision. Full Stop. The way to ensure robust implementation of that vision is to organize. Follow that with more organizing. Finish with organizing. And I commit to organizing with you all every step of the way.

Jake Hudnut - Yes, I support the Grand Street Vision proposal and the eventual plan must be designed and implemented by good engineers using a data-driven design philosophy. We don't have to re-invent the wheel in Jersey City. Using a data-driven design philosophy (i.e. Complete Streets and National Association of City Transportation Officials recommendations) reduces the debate, fosters consensus, and quiets opponents. This makes implementation easier and more effective (i.e., no watered-down compromises).

Nicholas J Grillo - Over all yes, I support it, however, there is a lot of negative feedback from Paulus Hook Residents about this proposal. I think more education is necessary. However, as stated previously, Downtown needs a comprehensive traffic study. If we do this and identify other sources of bottlenecks AND incorporate Road diets and complete Streets into other areas I believe it will work. I am certainly supportive.

Madeleine Giansanti Cag - Yes. I strongly support the redesign of Grand St. I will be an advocate for a comprehensive solution. I am tired of seeing great initiatives become disappointments because of lack of follow through. I am a decisive person. Once I get all the information I need to make a decision. I make it, stick to it and do everything I can to make it happen. I strive to be impeccable with my words. Thanks for the opportunity to talk about smarter street design. A huge part of city life is safer, more pleasant streets, thanks for the work that you do in promoting this.