

WARD E Council Candidate Survey Q&A



Rebecca Symes



James Solomon

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.