

INTRODUCTION

What is your name as it will appear on the ballot?

Nicolas O'Rourke

What office are you seeking?

City Council At-Large

Campaign Committee Name & Address:

Nic for Philly

Campaign Website Address:

www.nicforphilly.com

Candidate Introduction:

<https://www.nicforphilly.com/about>

ROADWAY SAFETY

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: https://www.5thsq.org/2023_issues

Short Response:

1. a) Will you commit to reducing Philadelphia's annual traffic deaths in half by 2026?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

b) Do you support redesigning Philadelphia's most dangerous roadways if this means eliminating travel lanes for automobiles and parking spaces?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

c) Daylighting is a pedestrian safety measure achieved by replacing curb parking spaces near an intersection with flexible posts, planters, or bollards – increasing visibility for pedestrians and drivers. Do you support daylighting more intersections in Philadelphia if this means removing parking spaces?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

2. Will you support a ballot measure to establish a PHL Department of Transportation, combining the transportation division of the Streets Department with the Office of Transportation, Infrastructure, and Sustainability (oTIS)?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

3. After two terms in office, the Kenney Administration will have built 30 miles of protected bicycle lanes. Will you support an expansion of Philadelphia's network of protected bicycle lanes by an additional 30 miles by 2028?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

4. a) The pilot speed camera program on Roosevelt Blvd has changed driver behavior, improved safety, and saved lives. Do you support making the speed cameras on Roosevelt Blvd permanent?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

b) Do you support expanding speed camera enforcement to more high-crash corridors across Philadelphia?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

Use this space if you'd like to elaborate on any of the above short response questions:

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Long Response:

5. Despite the city taking a Vision Zero pledge to reduce traffic deaths to zero by 2030, more than 120 people died on city streets in 2022. What will you do to significantly lower the rates of traffic deaths in Philadelphia?

Traffic deaths occur in low income areas - we know this. The data from Philadelphia shows it. West Philly and North Philly have some of the highest rates of pedestrians killed by car crashes. This is not surprising intuitively. Owning a car in the poorest big city in the country can be a luxury for many. Biking, public transit, and walkable neighborhoods are not just amenities but often the only way many Philadelphians can cross the city. We need to recommit our efforts to a vision zero for the city. The current leadership in the Streets Department needs a makeover and we need to put transit advocates in charge of building a safer and more equitable public transit system. The current systems for public input have many feeling left out of the process. As a city councilmember, I will work with organizations like 5th Square to advise on how best to move the city towards a true vision zero goal.

6. Many curb cuts, crosswalks, bus stops, and sidewalks across Philadelphia are routinely blocked by illegally-parked vehicles. How will you address this specific problem?

Philadelphia needs better enforcement at the end of the day. With new leadership at the Philadelphia Parking Authority and the potential for a new mayor to come in with a fresh lens for how Philadelphia is achieving vision zero, the city is in a unique moment where we can reform and step up enforcement on this issue. As a councilmember, I want to ensure that this is done equitably across Philadelphia. Enforcement of these laws cannot be neighborhood specific or only in those with the most resources.

7. What is your plan to ensure the city's sidewalks are safe and usable for all pedestrians, including people with disabilities and families with strollers?

A city that is not accessible and poses challenges for those with disabilities is not a family welcoming city. We need to step up enforcement as I mentioned above and ensure that we as a city government are doing the outreach necessary to educate people. In addition, building new daylight intersections that can expand bike networks,

green the city, and increase visibility we know changes behavior directly. I would support building these out and increased funding for these efforts.

PUBLIC SPACE

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: https://www.5thsq.org/2023_issues

Short Response:

1. Will you support an expansion of the current municipal street sweeping program, even if it means non-compliant motorists may receive parking violations or have their vehicles towed?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

2. Do you support easing regulations on outdoor dining streeteries and facilitating more parklets and pedestrian plazas even if this means eliminating space for parking?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

Use this space if you'd like to elaborate on any of the above short response questions:

Long Response:

3. Place-based interventions like greening vacant lots, repairing abandoned homes, and planting street trees in Philadelphia is linked to a reduction in violent crime, a decrease in illegal dumping, and lower rates of depression among residents. How will your office work to accomplish these place-based interventions in historically-disinvested neighborhoods?

I was proud to speak out and advocate for Councilmember Kendra Brooks' legislation that returned community gardens to the people from the US Bank. Examples like this where the city privatizes these lots for profit shows how Black and brown communities have been disinvested from causing public spaces to become more scarce. In West Philly, we have a vibrant community of urban farmers and green space networks that help foster communities. By looking into areas where we have seen the most public disinvestment, we can expand how we are connecting communities to each other in this city.

4. Philadelphia's public spaces suffer from two main types of improper waste disposal: littering and illegal dumping. For decades, the City's reduction and removal efforts have been woefully inadequate. What would you do to solve this issue?

I have spent the four years since my last campaign getting to know every corner of this city. I've seen how uneven enforcement around illegal dumping is. This is how our city gets the reputation of being one of the dirtiest. I would like to look at how Philly 311 responds to these reports. I supported the council's efforts to increase fines for those caught dumping, but the city's response time tends to be the issue. I would work with the city to help streamline this process.

5. The city has struggled to staff and adequately fund city services, which has resulted in reduced hours at libraries, pools, and recreation centers. How would you ensure consistent and convenient hours for these facilities?

This is one of the most important issues facing this city. How we can have a public safety crisis and not extend the hours of community centers is unfathomable to me. If our youth and families don't have a place to go after school or on weekends or during the summers then where else do we expect them to turn?

I support the Philly Wealth Tax proposal which would directly fund parks and rec by raising over \$200 million of revenue for the city. We can't afford not investing in these city services and when I am a council member, I will make this a priority in my first term. I will use the bully pulpit of my office to forcefully call attention to the unjustness that city austerity budgets cause its residents. It's time for the wealth among us to pay their fair share.

TRANSPORTATION & TRANSIT

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: https://www.5thsq.org/2023_issues

Short Response:

1. Do you support the City of Philadelphia enrolling all municipal employees into the SEPTA Key Advantage program?
☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____
2. Do you support the City establishing a fare discount program for low-income riders?
☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____
3. Do you support congestion pricing - a toll for vehicles entering Center City and University City during peak travel times - with funding used for improving public transportation?
☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____
4. Do you support increasing the cost of monthly residential parking permits and using the funds for improving public transportation?
☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____
5. a) Do you support expanding bus-only lanes throughout Philadelphia, even if this means removing a lane of travel for personal vehicles or parking?
☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____
b) Do you support using camera technology to enforce bus-only lanes and bus stops by ticketing violators?
☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____
6. Will you advocate for increasing local transit funding to SEPTA?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

7. Do you support a subway/ metro line for Roosevelt Blvd?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

8. The City of Denver launched a popular e-bike rebate program in an effort to reduce vehicle miles traveled. The rebate program offered \$1,200 for income-qualified residents and \$400 for everyone else for e-bike purchases. Do you support a similar program here in Philadelphia?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

9. Do you support micro-mobility initiatives such as scooter share programs for Philadelphia?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

Use this space if you'd like to elaborate on any of the above short response questions:

Long Response:

10. What are your ideas for combating Philadelphia's problem with traffic congestion?

During my last campaign, I spoke about the need for dedicated city bus lanes. This is an economical and racial justice issue as well as a traffic congestion problem. Those who cannot afford a car are more likely to take public transit and the easier we make it for them to do so, the less reliant our city is on cars. I would also generally be supportive of dynamic pricing for parking in Center City. We know from our traffic patterns when peak travel time is to downtown. We have a wonderful regional network and we should work with the private sector to encourage and grow participation in it.

11. What are your solutions to ensure SEPTA rebuilds its ridership post-pandemic?

As the city rebuilds from the pandemic, growing the membership of SEPTA will be incredibly important to our economy, revenue streams, and less traffic deaths in our city. The city should work to extend ridership passes to employees, students, and others where it makes sense. We should eliminate transfer fees and encourage family passes for SEPTA with an eye towards affordability. There are so many opportunities to do this that we are missing right now. We also must recognize that the increase in quality of life offenses on SEPTA is not acceptable. While balancing the need for reducing police interactions, we have to find a better way forward on this problem. If SEPTA gets the reputation for not being safe, there is no way we are going to turn around the ridership drop we have seen since COVID which is why I'm in favor of expanding city outreach services to SEPTA so we can connect with those in need of city resources.

Personal Travel Habits:

1. How often do you ride a bicycle for transportation in the city?
☒ Never ☐ Yearly ☐ Monthly ☐ Weekly ☐ Daily
2. How often do you ride public transportation in the city?
☐ Never ☐ Yearly ☐ Monthly ☐ Weekly ☒ Daily
3. How often do you travel by car in the city?
☐ Never ☐ Yearly ☐ Monthly ☒ Weekly ☐ Daily
4. Will you commit to taking public transportation at least one week of each year while in office?
☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other:
5. How do you typically commute to work? Describe your experience traveling in Philadelphia and what you would do to improve it.

I don't own a car currently. Primarily I use public transit and ride share services or taxis to travel from work. Because I have organized across the city, I know which neighborhoods I cannot easily get to from my home. I hope we can better connect the city with public transit lines.

HOUSING & LAND USE

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: https://www.5thsq.org/2023_issues

Short Response:

1. Do you support eliminating minimum parking requirements for all of Philadelphia's zoning categories?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

2. Will you veto or vote against downzoning overlays?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

3. Do you support legalizing Single-Room Occupancy dwellings (SROs) in all multifamily and commercial zoning districts across Philadelphia?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

4. Will you support designating Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) overlays city-wide, allowing increased commercial and residential zoning density near all rail transit stations in Philadelphia?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

5. Should our city government encourage the growth of Philadelphia's population back to 2 million residents?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

6. Should our zoning allow for denser housing in high-income, high-amenity neighborhoods to accommodate more residents?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other: _____

Use this space if you'd like to elaborate on any of the above short response questions:

Housing is a human right and ensuring we have housing affordability is an issue that unites Philadelphia across every community I have visited on my campaign. This is a top policy priority for me and will be stepping into if elected.

Long Response:

7. The affordability crisis hits renters harder than owners. Philadelphia Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) estimates the city needs about 70,000 affordable rental units to meet demand. How will you address this affordable housing shortage?

The housing in Philadelphia is becoming less affordable and accessible and new development isn't meeting the needs of our city. We need to build on the momentum of the City Council's work to prevent evictions and create more protections for tenants by working to develop new truly affordable housing for all Philadelphians. As an organizer, I've been supportive of Councilmembers Helen Gym, Jamie Gautheir, and Kendra Brooks' efforts on City Council and have spoken publicly about this numerous times as an official with the Working Families Party.

We need to build more affordable housing and encourage development that does not displace long term residents. There are many different approaches to this that I am open to but keeping folks in their homes has to be a priority and will go a long way to help make people comfortable with new development. To that end, I support expanding good cause protections for renters and would work with the existing coalitions to figure out how to advance rent control in a way that makes sense for Philadelphia.

8. Record low housing supply has pushed up home prices, closing off the possibility of home ownership to many first-time homebuyers. The median home value in the Philadelphia metropolitan area has reached \$320,000, increasing \$100,000 from 5 years ago. How can we keep neighborhoods affordable and sustainable as Philadelphia sees more growth and development?

Philadelphia should better target our current tax abatement to incentivize affordable housing. I'm supportive of repealing our current tax abatement and restructuring it in a way that encourages the growth of affordable housing, not dampens it for wealthy developers. We should also continue to increase funding for the Housing Trust Fund to support affordable housing initiatives.

9. Philadelphia faces some serious headwinds from more residents and businesses considering leaving the city for the suburbs, more than at any point in the last two decades. What do you think must happen to ensure the region's economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic comes out in urban-Philadelphia's favor?

Good union jobs, vibrant communities, and accessible infrastructure attract new residents to Philadelphia. Affordability keeps families here. We must and can tackle the issues that prevent all of these things from coexisting and working together to create a more prosperous Philadelphia for all of us. Every issue that I tackle as a councilmember if I'm fortunate to be elected will be looked at through a racial justice lens, an equity lens, and an affordability lens. It's not just about building back better, but building back smarter so that we are not creating problems for future generations to tackle.

CLOSING STATEMENT

Tell us more about what you bring to the table as an ally for urbanist politics in City Hall.
Why should 5th Square endorse you over other candidates running for your position?
What makes you the right person to advance the urbanist movement's goals politically at the local level?

As the organizing director of Pennsylvania Working Families Party, I worked to build a party of, by, and for the multi-racial working class in Philadelphia. I know firsthand the challenges of bringing in community members who have been disaffected and silenced into the political process. I've seen the challenges of building power at the intersection of race and class. And that's exactly why I am running for office. We need to encourage voters to find political homes in organizations like 5th Square so they stay involved. And as a City Councilmember I look forward to thinking together how we can build out co-governance strategies on the issues of urbanism and build a more green, accessible, and equitable city. It would be an honor to have your organization's endorsement and support.