

# INTRODUCTION

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

Helen Gym

What office are you seeking?

Mayor of Philadelphia

Campaign Committee Name & Address:

Friends of Helen Gym

Campaign Website Address:

[www.helengym.com](http://www.helengym.com)

Candidate Introduction:

I came into government after an organizing career centered on funding public schools and promoting equitable development in immigrant communities. I fought against casinos and stadiums in Chinatown and the closure of public schools because I believed in the promise of public spaces and dense, livable communities.

As an at-large councilmember, I have pushed for a citywide vision that promotes housing as a human right and a connected city encouraging ease of mobility within communities. I was a vocal proponent of Rebuild's investment in our public parks, libraries and schools, and continue to support the development of public play spaces such as school playgrounds. My pedestrian safety bill promotes stricter standards for sidewalk safety around construction sites. I believe zoning can be used as a tool for fair housing and integrated neighborhoods, and I support increasing multifamily zoning to help expand inclusionary housing.

I have fought for transit policy that challenges poverty and inequity in our city. I pushed for an equity agenda during the development of the CONNECT plan. I believe in income-based fares, fare capping, the elimination of transfer fees, a transit program for university students, and free transit for vulnerable classes, in particular youth. My commuter benefits ordinance requires employers with 50 or more full-time employees in Philadelphia to offer a commuter benefit program, which can be used for public transit passes and fares, van-pooling, and pending federal authorization, bicycle expenses. As a neighborhood cyclist myself, I believe in the expansion of protected bike lanes and rigorous attention to their evolution and improvement.

I will continue to organize alongside transit advocates who see their work aligned with a broader equity agenda for our city.

# ROADWAY SAFETY

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

## 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?

I, along with my transportation executives, will publicly lead the effort to reduce traffic deaths. As with so many issues that shouldn't be controversial, but attract opposition, reducing traffic deaths is about making people and their demand for safe streets visible. Simply put, my administration will not put the convenience of some people who drive ahead of the safety of others who chose to walk, ride a bike, or are behind the wheel themselves.

Speed is what causes fatalities and serious injuries. Based on the success of the Roosevelt Blvd speed camera pilot program, I will support the considerable and rapid expansion of automated speed enforcement throughout the city. Guided by established authorities like the National Transportation Safety Board and National Association of City Transportation officials, a Gym administration will accelerate the implementation of proven safety measures across the high injury network identified in the Connect Plan with special attention to the communities that have for generations been subject to under investment in their infrastructure.

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?

We can start with a program to prioritize intersections on common routes to schools, parks, senior housing and commercial corridors for day lighting treatments. We should also work with PPA to enforce illegal parking that constitutes a significant safety risk in areas beyond the existing enforcement zones.

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?

City government needs to lead by example ensuring that sidewalks owned by the city are in good repair and properly maintained. My administration will also fully enforce the pedestrian safety bill I authored in 2017 and ensure safe passage around construction sites. We will explore the creation of an annual fund to invest in sidewalk repairs for low-income property owners along critical routes for seniors and people with mobility impairments.

# PUBLIC SPACE

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

Investments in place based interventions are of great value to promote community pride and reduce violent crime. Expanding the budgets for the Community Life Improvement Program and Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, which both have well established vacant lot cleaning programs, could show rapid results. Abandoned properties present a more difficult challenge that will require a multi-agency and cross sector approach. For all of these initiatives my administration will begin our work in the neighborhoods most impacted by violent crime.

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?

Expanding street cleaning and coordinating it with trash collection will immediately reduce the litter that is generated by improper storage of trash and the challenges of properly handling that trash. We need to pilot alternative means of collection that are sensitive to neighborhood context including household bin based collection.

The Streets and Commerce Departments need to support expanded litter bin options in business improvement districts and along commercial corridors. Other community based initiatives to address litter while not expected to replace city services should be supported to supplement the cities efforts.

At our parks we need to ensure that we have the proper trash cans to accommodate the demands of park visitors and operations to ensure those cans are properly maintained.

Illegal dumping requires both aggressive cleaning efforts and renewed emphasis on enforcement with upgraded cameras at dumping hot spots. support expanded litter bin options in business improvement districts and along commercial corridors.

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?

My administration will provide increased and stable funding for libraries, pools, and recreation centers. As important as increased and stable funding, my administration will work with the Civil Service Board and unions to modernize our hiring process to ensure we can appropriately meet the public's need for services.

## TRANSPORTATION & TRANSIT

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: [https://www.5thsq.org/2023\\_issues](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: Would study among other transit funding options
4. Do you support increasing the cost of monthly residential parking permits and using the funds for improving public transportation?  
 Yes     No     Other: Not necessarily opposed, but believe there are more substantial means to generate this needed revenue, including collaborating with the collar counties on a joint plan for increased funding.
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:

The most recent studies of transportation funding options were conducted before travel patterns changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. I support a refreshed look at these options, based on current and forecasted travel patterns. I cannot commit to supporting congestion pricing until I understand the equity impacts and potential for displacing employment in Center City and University City.

**Long Response:**

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

Philadelphia has some of the worst congestion in the country. With a recent study finding that drivers across the region spent more than 114 hours stuck in traffic per year. Other studies have documented that non-White residents of Philadelphia spend 50 more hours on average in traffic each year than White residents and low income communities suffer disproportionate harm from the air quality impacts of congestion.

Philadelphians need better transportation options to get them out of traffic. This includes safe, clean and reliable SEPTA service and an expanded network of bike lanes that make it safe to take the 25% of trips that are less than 2 miles by bike. Improving the quality of the pedestrian experience and reducing violent crime will encourage residents to choose to take more trips on foot. In addition to investments in transit and cycling, there are operational strategies to get Philadelphians out of traffic whether they are riding a bus or behind the wheel.

- Less than half of all of Philadelphia traffic signals are connected to the city's Traffic Operations Center, meaning there is no way to optimize those signals to prioritize transit or lower delay times and associated congestion and pollution. Current capital budgets only bring the number of connected signals to 48%.
- Too much traffic, particularly in Center City and along business corridors is caused by doubled parked trucks and cars. Through a mix of policy and enforcement we can make sure there is enough loading for trucks and drivers making quick stops, and get tough on trucks blocking traffic lanes.

In the long term we have to address land use to reduce congestion, building more affordable and market rate housing along the Broad Street and Market Frankford lines, as well as on our regional rail corridors.

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

SEPTA ridership was declining long before the start of COVID. Those declines accelerated during the height of COVID-19 restrictions. While transit services have been restored to 89% of pre-pandemic levels, ridership has recovered to only 57%, which represent more than 550,000 daily riders. Those riders are overwhelmingly city residents and 61 percent of those riders live in households that earn less than \$50,000/year. For Philadelphia residents living below the poverty line the top obstacle to employment is transportation, more than double those who report child care or criminal history ([pg 31](#)). Philadelphia cannot be a thriving city without a successful SEPTA.

Even though the City doesn't operate SEPTA, it can meaningfully influence SEPTA's success through \$100M+ annual contribution of City tax payer funds, our board seats, executive involvement in planning, and how we operate city streets.

In multiple surveys SEPTA riders are clear about their needs: a safe, clean, and affordable system that provides frequent and reliable services. A Gym administration should start at the top, ensuring that City appointees to the SEPTA Board are SEPTA riders and transportation experts. Together with multiple city departments here's how to deliver on those rider demands:

**Safe and Clean:**

- Ensure cleaning of every Market Frankford and Broad Street Line at the end of every run
- Prioritize street lighting improvements around bus stops and SEPTA stations
- Expand SEPTA's SCOPE program
- Increase foot patrols by Philadelphia Police around SEPTA stations and by SEPTA Police and safety ambassadors in stations and on vehicles
- Coordinate closely with school district to improve use of SEPTA by students at school dismissal times
- Renovate City Hall Station, the crossroads of the system

**Affordable System with Frequent Service**

- Implement 8 priority bus corridors from the City's Strategic Transit Plan
- Equalize the fares between SEPTA Buses and Regional Rail in North, West, and Southwest Philadelphia, provide \$2 fares to 15 Regional Rail Stations

**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 often walk or bike to work, however the demands of being a candidate for citywide office require me to drive most days to make it to multiple events every day. I am a strong proponent of public transportation and would certainly aim to take public transportation much more than the one week commitment when in office. I look forward to working with the 5th Square and other partners like the Bicycle Coalition to make Philadelphia a safer, greener, more connected city.

# HOUSING & LAND USE

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: [https://www.5thsq.org/2023\\_issues](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: Open to discussing further

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

Yes     No     Other: Open to discussing further

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:

**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?

On Council, I've done a substantial amount of work to protect renters.

I sponsored the Emergency Housing Protections Act, which kept Philadelphians housed during the COVID-19 pandemic by enacting a local eviction moratorium; an eviction diversion program; a temporary ban on late fees; and requiring tenants be provided the option of repayment plans to get back on track with rent. This legislation helped reduce evictions by 75 percent over two consecutive years and prevented tens of thousands of cases of COVID-19. (Co-sponsored with Councilmembers Gauthier and Brooks). We also developed and implemented Philadelphia's renowned Eviction Diversion Program, the first mandatory pre-filing diversion program in the nation requiring landlords and renters to resolve disputes with the aid of housing counseling before an eviction can be filed. The program has a 93% success rate in avoiding evictions and has been replicated by cities and states around the nation. In 2021, Philadelphia's diversion program was lauded and recommended as a national model by the White House, U.S. Department of Justice, and the Treasury Department.

I fought for local, state, and federal rental assistance funds, which resulted in the distribution of over \$230 million in rent assistance to Philadelphians through the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. I helped secure \$20M a year into the Housing Trust Fund to support affordable housing initiatives and eviction prevention efforts. I co-sponsored a charter change that ensured dedicated funding for the Housing Trust Fund at 0.5% of the city's annual operating budget, and championed a local housing voucher and rent subsidy program which launched in January 2020 to support individuals struggling to make their rent.

While this work was critical for protecting renters struggling to stay in their homes, we also need to recommit to housing as a human right, and look at how the city can evolve in its land use to build more affordable housing – and permanent affordable housing rather than short term fixes for people in crisis that don't upend the cycle of displacement.

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?

Many of the ideas outlined here are key to making our neighborhoods more sustainable and attractive to encourage new residents and growth in our city. Affordability needs to be prioritized as I believe it's currently one of the greatest assets our city has for attracting residents and workers on the east coast who find Philadelphia a more affordable alternative than D.C. or New York. Simply put, we need to build more housing – both dedicated affordable housing, and market rate, and we also need to expand permanent affordable housing options rather than short term bandaids for families in need.

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?

Covid proved that when a crisis like the pandemic occurs people will go to where they are comfortable calling home – and it's our job to make Philadelphia a place where people want to live, send their children to school, start a business, and age gracefully in. I have worked at the center of movements that have been critical to growth in Philadelphia, making our immigrant communities feel welcome and encouraged to live and thrive here, and a lifelong focus on education and a belief that our schools are critical neighborhood institutions that serve a foundation for the communities they serve. With a dedicated focus on improving safety in our community, making our streets and neighborhoods cleaner and greener, and prioritizing the quality of education offered in our city, we will make Philadelphia the world class city we know it is and should be – and a place where workers will want to live, and businesses will feel encouraged to locate themselves in to attract those workers. I also believe we need to take a serious look at our tax structure and bring together a new tax commission to review how to modernize our taxes and revenue pipelines to fit the modern economy.

## 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?

There are certainly other candidates in this race who bring good ideas to the table on urbanist issues and I would look forward to partnering with them in a Gym administration to see our shared vision brought to fruition. What I believe sets me apart from the field, is that when I came into council I was very clear about my priorities, and I took on problems that many elected officials before me (and in office now) have for years said were impossible to address, or passed the buck to someone else, and we found a way to make progress – and not incremental gains, but transformational progress.

When I began the process to pass my Fair Workweek legislation, I was told it would be impossible to win. But I got to work, pulled people together from business and labor, and we set ideology at the door and arrived at a set of principles that resulted in legislation that has improved the quality of life and livelihood for 130,000 hourly workers in our city.

When I learned how often people in Philadelphia were forced into eviction – 22,000 evictions a year (and those are households, not individuals), I set out to find a way to help solve the problem. We didn't know how we would accomplish it at the beginning, but we did our homework, sought out pilot efforts, and leveraged funding from local, state and federal resources and turned my Eviction Diversion Program into the most effective diversion program in the country that is now modeled in over 100 cities across 36 states and is a key tenant of the Biden White House's Renter's Bill of Rights.

I have the vision to set out to accomplish the kind of transformational change that our city needs, and the tenacity to actually get it done. I will take that with me into City Hall, and together we will continue to achieve what people before us said was impossible.