



2026 STATE LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

5th Square PAC — Philadelphia's Urbanist Political Action Committee

5th Square is Philadelphia's urbanist political action committee. Our mission is to achieve a more accessible, sustainable, and equitable Philadelphia for all residents through better mobility, public space, and planning policies.

Please refer us to any work you have done on these topics in your answers, if applicable. If you have any questions or would like clarification, please email us at 5thsq@5thsq.org

For 5th Square's positions on these issues see: https://www.5thsq.org/2026_issues

You may complete this questionnaire via [Google Form](#) or [Word Document](#) sent to 5thsq@5thsq.org

Responses to our policy questions will be published on our website -- we will not publish contact info and financial data. If you would like us to include a photo with your response, please email it to us at 5thsq@5thsq.org

⚠ DEADLINE: March 20th, 2026 at 11:59 PM. Only candidates who complete this questionnaire are eligible for a 5th Square endorsement.

CANDIDATE INTRODUCTION

Name as it will appear on the ballot:

Joe Hohenstein

Office sought (include district number):

State Representative (HD-177)

Campaign Committee Name & Address:

Friends of Joe Hohenstein, 1117 Wakeling St, Philadelphia, PA 19124

Campaign Website:

votehohenstein.com

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Candidate introduction (background, motivation for running, relevant experience):

I am running for re-election to be the State Representative of Pennsylvania's 177th District in order to give back to the neighborhoods I grew up in and have called home my entire life. I first decided to run for this office eight years ago. Although I lost in 2016, I found success in 2018 — flipping a seat that had been held by a Republican for 34 years!

Since my election in 2018, I have fought to improve the lives of working people through bold, progressive action. Coming from a union family myself, I have fought to protect workers' wages, retirement security, healthcare, and protection on the job. I have fought for fair funding of Philadelphia's public schools, public transit, and crumbling infrastructure. I have fought to increase the supply of housing, make housing more affordable, and protect families' homes from poor construction and unsafe building practices. And I have fought to stem the looming threats of climate change, to take on corporate greed, and to address the opioid epidemic in a comprehensive and effective manner.

As an immigration lawyer, I have always stood up for families striving to achieve the American Dream. Likewise, the 177th District needs an advocate in Harrisburg to stand up for each and every one of us, and to defend our right to Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. In my capacity as an elected official, I have done just that.

In my time in office I have sought to be a champion for the communities and issues that need allies and advocates, and to speak up for folks who often do not have a voice. My legislative efforts thus far have focused on disability rights, immigration advocacy, supporting the LGBTQ+ community, and addressing the climate crisis. Of course, I have also sought to be a voice for my constituents in our district that is made up of middle neighborhoods that are often overlooked by government funders and policy makers. The people of the Riverwards and Lower Northeast Philly epitomize the pernicious impact of living in places that progress has passed by. I believe that everyone deserves to live in safe, clean, and green

spaces and have access to economic opportunity, and I seek to bring progress to our community and the rest of our commonwealth.

For the 177th District, my vision is to provide my neighbors with spaces where all modes of transportation are safe and supported, where their kids can learn and play in facilities that sustain both the planet and their young spirits, and where workers are treated with dignity and respect.

ROADWAY SAFETY & HIGHWAYS

Philadelphia had 120 traffic fatalities in 2024 — stubbornly high compared to peer cities. Some of Pennsylvania's most dangerous streets are PennDOT-owned arterials running through dense urban neighborhoods. As a state legislator, you have direct authority over PennDOT's mission, budget, and legislation governing how roads are designed and operated.

1. PennDOT has proposed widening I-95 south of I-676 through Center City and South Philadelphia, adding travel lanes and expanding ramps. Do you support this project as proposed?

Yes, support as proposed Support rehabilitation only, no added lanes Oppose the project entirely Undecided

Comment / Please explain:

I currently serve on the House Transportation Committee, and I believe our focus should be on properly maintaining the roads we already have and making them safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists alike. We should not be prioritizing large expansion projects to widen highways. Research studies continue to prove that expanding highways simply does not improve traffic congestion over time. It is not money well spent nor is it a feasible long term solution. Worse yet, such projects also come with significant negative effects, such as families losing their homes, communities losing public spaces, and everyone having to deal with more traffic, more noise pollution, and more pollutants in our air.

Instead, we should be fully funding SEPTA and prioritizing public transit across the commonwealth so that Pennsylvanians have access to safer, more affordable, and more reliable modes of transportation.

2. [HB 291 \(parking-protected bike lanes\)](#) would allow PennDOT to design and build bike lanes with a parked-car buffer on state roads, which PennDOT is currently not permitted to do. Do you support HB 291?

Yes No Other

Comment / Please explain:

I am a co-sponsor of this legislation. It is a commonsense solution that will help protect cyclists in our city and prevent further tragedies from occurring.

3. [HB 1504, the 'Vulnerable Road User' Bill](#), would increase fines for reckless drivers who cause death or serious injury to pedestrians, cyclists, or other vulnerable users. Do you support HB 1504?

Yes No Other

Comment / Please explain:

This is another commonsense solution. I wish we did not need to incentivize motorists to drive more safely, but anyone who has encountered a crosswalk in Philadelphia understands that more needs to be done to ensure safety on our streets.

4. PennDOT's mission is often described as maximizing the flow of cars through our streets and highways at all costs. Which of the following reforms would you prioritize to reorient PennDOT toward a safety-first culture? Select all that apply.

- Adopt Vision Zero and the Safe Systems Approach as formal agency goals
- Create a separate PennDOT district/office serving Philadelphia specifically
- Hire and empower a dedicated bicycle/pedestrian coordinator with project approval authority
- Adopt a 'Fix It First' policy prioritizing maintenance over expansion
- Adopt a standardized project scoring formula (like [Virginia's SMART SCALE](#)) to allocate transportation dollars based on a balance of safety, accessibility (to jobs), and equity outcomes.
- Remove the municipal maintenance agreement requirement that allows a single township official to block sidewalk construction on PennDOT projects
- None of the above / I oppose these reforms
- Other (explain below)

Comment / Please explain:

Yes, I support adopting these various reforms. Traffic considerations should not be the sole focus of PennDOT. We must also prioritize safety, cyclists/pedestrians, public transit, accessibility, affordability, and maintenance/sustainability; as well as the economic and environmental impacts of each.

5. Would you support a statewide tax credit for e-bikes (electric bicycles), similar to popular programs enacted in [Colorado](#) and [Denver](#) that have demonstrably reduced automotive vehicle miles traveled?

- Yes No Other

Comment / Please explain:

Yes, I would support a statewide tax credit for e-bikes as long as we are also making considerations for safety.. I would also consider tax credits for similar programs to encourage other alternative methods of transportation. I believe Philadelphia would stand to benefit from such policies, as would other communities across Pennsylvania.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

SEPTA faces a \$213 million operating deficit and over \$5 billion in unfunded capital needs, stemming in part from the expiration of Act 89 funding. Without a legislative solution, SEPTA faces severe service cuts with wide economic consequences for the Commonwealth. As a state legislator, you control the funding formulas, enabling legislation, and budget allocations that determine SEPTA's survival.

6. SEPTA's operating deficit requires a dedicated, recurring revenue solution. The Transit For All PA coalition has proposed several options. Please rank the following funding mechanisms from most to least preferred (1 = most preferred), or mark 'Oppose' for any you would not support:

Funding Mechanism	Rank	Oppose
Interstate User Fees (statewide tolls on interstates/expressways)	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Oppose
Allow counties and municipalities to raise their own money for public transit (HB 1146)	YES!	<input type="checkbox"/> Oppose
Congestion pricing : allow municipalities and counties to levy tolls on vehicles entering their most congested areas	Yes, but...	<input type="checkbox"/> Oppose
Excise tax on third-party vehicle deliveries (e.g., Amazon)	Yes, but...	<input type="checkbox"/> Oppose

Comment / Please explain:

I struggle to rank these funding mechanisms in an order of preference, but I suppose I'd rank **HB-1146** first since I am its Prime Sponsor. As we saw in 2023 when I-95 collapsed near the edge of my district, it only takes one bad accident to create a transportation crisis. Thankfully, we could lean on our public transit system then, but we are in a much more uncertain place now thanks to the State Senate Republicans' refusal to fund SEPTA. This legislation would provide us with more options to ensure the survival of our public transit.

I am generally supportive of **Interstate User Fees**, however I have concerns with how they have been managed in recent years. For starters, I would like to see more transparency from the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission and less [closed door executive sessions that end in massive raises for their chief officers](#). We also lost out on \$200 million in unpaid tolls last year, so I would like to see improvements in toll collection before we consider raising the cost of any existing tolls.

I support **Congestion Pricing** in theory. It can help raise significant funding while also reducing traffic congestion and improving air quality. It also just makes sense to allow municipalities and local regions to implement funding mechanisms to address the true costs associated with use. My main concern is in how we implement it to ensure a degree of economic equity. I do not want to place a disproportionate burden on those who can least afford it, especially right now when the cost of living is so high and our public transit is not yet reliable.

I am interested in **Excise Taxes on Third-Party Vehicle Deliveries**, though again, I have concerns about how it might be implemented. I absolutely support taxing corporations like Amazon to ensure they are paying their fair share while making profits off of our public infrastructure. That being said, I do not want to place additional financial burdens on delivery drivers and gig economy workers who are already being underpaid. Without the proper enforcement mechanisms or oversight, I do not expect that any taxes levied upon such corporate entities would actually be paid for by their profit margins. In reality, I suspect these costs would be shifted upon their workers (or on consumers). If we can ensure that this does not happen, I would fully support this.

7. HB 1146 would allow local governments to levy their own taxes and fees to fund public transit in their jurisdictions. Do you support this local revenue-enabling legislation?

Yes No Other

If yes: what local revenue tools should be permitted? Select all you support:

Payroll tax Employer head tax Real estate transfer tax Property tax Land value tax
 Parking tax Sales tax Other:

As I stated above, I am the Prime Sponsor of this legislation. When it comes to which revenue tools should be permitted to provide this local funding, I believe that is a decision for each county and municipality to make for themselves.

Generally, I think it makes sense to levy a parking tax to raise funds. This would help discourage driving and incentivize public transit. However, beyond that, I think it is a matter that requires the local input. Very few people are happy to pay more in taxes, especially here in Philadelphia where we pay into the commonwealth more than we get back. So I see this as an issue that should be decided by the voters and by the elected officials they send to City Hall.

8. SEPTA is pursuing three major service transformation initiatives: the New Bus Network redesign, Reimagining Regional Rail (more frequent service with fare integration), and Trolley Modernization. Do you support state-level actions to accelerate these initiatives?

Yes, accelerate all three Yes, some of them (specify below) No — let SEPTA proceed at its own pace No — I have concerns about one or more

Comment / Please explain:

Our main goal should be to make our public transportation more accessible, more reliable, and safer — these three initiatives will do just that. As such, I fully support accelerating them. We cannot afford to wait for these improvements, we needed them yesterday, and I'd like to see these benefits sooner rather than later.

9. Do you support funding and constructing a [Roosevelt Boulevard subway](#) connecting Northeast Philadelphia to Center City via the Broad Street Line?

Yes No Other

If yes: what concrete steps would you take in the first two years of your term to advance planning and secure funding?

I have been and continue to be a strong proponent of constructing a Roosevelt Boulevard subway line from the Northeast to Center City. This project would connect Northeast Philadelphia and Lower Bucks County to the rest of the city and region, and it would benefit all of us. In the short term, it would create good paying jobs. In the long term, it will provide lasting benefits for our communities, our environment, and our economy.

I believe that my legislation (HB-1146) would help us secure some of the funding needed for this project. Beyond that, we will also need state and federal funding. I do not expect we will see one dollar for this while Trump is in the White House, but perhaps that could change if we retake Congress. However, there are definitely opportunities for funding on the state level. This is something I have been pushing for within my own caucus and in my meetings with the Governor. I will continue to do so, in addition to securing a long-term funding solution for SEPTA.

10. Would you support a state tax credit for households that own zero or one cars, as a complement to transit investment and to reduce congestion and emissions?

Yes No Need more information

Comment / Please explain:

I support incentivizing public transit and de-incentivizing driving in a general sense, however this is an initiative I would like to know about before I reach a conclusion. I would certainly welcome a conversation about your membership about this.

HOUSING & LAND USE

Pennsylvania needs 450,000 new housing units by 2035, per the state's own Housing Action Plan.

11. Which of the following statements do you agree with (check all that apply): "Building more housing...

...reduces rents and home prices."

...reduces displacement pressures."

...improves race and class equity."

...supports a robust, durable, and growing economy."

...is essential for providing a safe haven for marginalized groups fleeing states with oppressive laws."

Comment / Please explain:

I agree with all of the above.

12. The PA State Housing Action Plan calls for 450,000 new units by 2035. In your view, what is the single greatest barrier to meeting this goal in Pennsylvania?

- Restrictive local zoning (e.g. single-family-only mandates, parking minimums)
- Insufficient government subsidy for affordable housing
- High construction costs
- Other (explain below)

Comment / Please explain:

Again, I struggle to rank these against each other. I see each of these as barriers we must overcome. However, if pressed, I think **restrictive local zoning** likely edges out the other two. The status quo clearly is not working, and exclusionary zoning practices currently serve as a hindrance in our ability to combat the affordable housing crisis. As such, I have supported and will continue to support legislation that removes some of these barriers to help ensure Pennsylvanians have access to quality, affordable housing. Former Rep. Josh Siegel and Rep. Tairk Khan are two colleagues I have looked to on these issues. While the State Senate Republicans have been a barrier unto themselves on this issue, I am hopeful that we will soon have an opportunity to pursue further zoning reforms should all go well this November.

Insufficient government subsidies for affordable housing is another barrier we must overcome. As I stated previously, I am not optimistic that we will get any help from Washington on this issue either. However, I do believe increased support is possible on the state level. I've had promising conversations with Governor Shapiro on this, and I am hopeful we can achieve progress together.

I also think **high construction costs** are a significant factor, especially in the last year thanks to Trump's chaotic tariff policies. The economic climate is simply too volatile right now. There's just too much uncertainty currently as a result of the day to day policy changes coming from the White House. This was already a problem before Trump, but his willingness to use economic policy as leverage against our trading partners has only exacerbated the issue.

13. Several housing supply bills have recently been introduced in the General Assembly. Please indicate your position on each:

Bill	Support	Oppose
HB 2185 — Legalize duplexes, triplexes & fourplexes in all single-family zones statewide	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HB 2155 — Prohibit municipal parking minimums statewide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HB 2186 — Remove barriers to Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) statewide	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HB 2109 — The Golden Girls Law (legalize unrelated adults sharing a home)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HB 2192 — Creation of a statewide Housing Council	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) upzoning near high-frequency transit stations (memo , Rep. Inglis)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comment / Please explain:

I support five of these six bills currently, however I am still uncertain about HB-2155. I would like to speak further with my colleagues who have sponsored this legislation before it has my full support. I would also welcome input from 5th Square on this.

I understand the limitations that parking minimums place on the housing supply, but I am also under no illusions as to the concerns my constituents have about parking already. I am reluctant to support any

legislation that could exacerbate what is already a major concern — and frankly, it is not currently feasible for many of our neighbors to live their lives without a car. Ultimately, I'm wary of taking steps to limit parking without first securing funding for SEPTA so we have an accessible, safe, and reliable alternative to driving.

14. Pennsylvania currently only authorizes 2nd and 3rd class cities and boroughs to enact split-rate property tax (AKA land value tax), whereby property taxes are shifted from buildings to land. Do you support expanding this authorization to all Pennsylvania municipalities?

Yes No Other

Comment / Please explain:

This is another issue that I would like to learn more about before making up my mind. I have heard some of the discourse on this, and based on my understanding I'm inclined to agree. But I'd still like more information and would appreciate hearing from 5th Square's membership on this issue.

15. Philadelphia sees over 1,000 overdose deaths annually. Do you support prohibiting municipalities from using land use regulations (such as zoning restrictions or councilmanic prerogative) to block evidence-based harm reduction facilities, including safe injection/overdose prevention sites, from operating in appropriate locations?

Yes — land use should not be used to block harm reduction facilities No — municipalities should retain this authority Other

Comment / Please explain:

This is a contentious issue in my district given our proximity to Kensington and Allegheny. While I fully understand the importance of engaging in harm reduction practices, I also believe that people deserve a say about their own neighborhood. So I think it should be up to the members of a community to decide whether or not a safe injection site should exist within their community.

Addiction is often a symptom and so we must heal the cause if we are to expect lasting solutions. My past service on the Pennsylvania Task Force on Warm Hand-offs has informed my view that we need improved access to long term in-person treatment in order to address the underlying causes of addiction, such as mental health ailments and trauma. It is my hope that we find a way to provide real, effective treatment — not just 2-4 weeks and release back onto the streets. Real treatment can take months, even years. We need to invest in more residential treatment centers and get insurance to pay for the longer stays and in-depth treatment models (models that also include the family members affected by their loved one's addiction).

Ideally, the worst perpetrators in the pharmaceutical industry should be held culpable and be forced to provide a good bulk of the cost for expanded recovery programs, such as the infamous Sackler Family of Purdue Pharma who flooded the nation with OxyContin. I think this is the most just way to address this issue, but I am open to other options to identify and implement comprehensive solutions for the opioid crisis.

CLOSING STATEMENT

16. State legislators from Philadelphia represent the densest, most transit-dependent, and most pedestrian-active constituencies in Pennsylvania — yet many colleagues from suburban and rural districts have little exposure to urbanism. How would you build relationships and make the case for pro-transit, pro-housing, and pro-safety policies among legislators from outside our region?

When I think of the issues that need champions, urbanist movements like 5th Square fit squarely within my vision as a legislator. We need more lawmakers standing up for sensible investment in public transit, implementing city planning that is more people-centered, and supporting housing policies that

make a baseline quality (and enjoyment) of life attainable for everyone. I have lived in the neighborhood I represent for almost all of my life. My family has roots go back nearly 175 years here, and I am motivated by a love for the neighborhoods where I grew up. I believe this makes me a perfect spokesperson for urbanism.

I have worked to be an advocate in my neighborhood as well as in Harrisburg. In our community, I have helped negotiate CBAs between RCOs and developers to address environmental concerns. I've also helped find mutually beneficial arrangements between private developers and local organizations to secure donations for our efforts to expand and improve the Delaware River Trails running through the 177th District.

In Harrisburg, I do my best to meet my colleagues where they are at — often literally. As a member of the House Game & Fisheries Committee, I try to take advantage of opportunities to visit the more pastoral parts of our commonwealth. A favorite of mine is to tag along for trout restocking season. These shared experiences help bridge the gap between my lived experiences in Philly and those of my colleagues from drastically different parts of Pennsylvania.

Everyone has their own perspective, but ultimately we are all motivated by their own self-interest and a desire to take care of our loved ones. When I talk to my colleagues to lobby for their support of legislation that will help us in Philadelphia, I try to explain how making Philadelphia stronger makes the rest of Pennsylvania stronger as well. We truly are an economic engine, not just for the region, but for the entire commonwealth. Our interests are aligned and we need to work together for one another. This has been my appeal when I've talked with colleagues about funding SEPTA.

17. Is there anything not covered above that you would like 5th Square members to know about your candidacy or your approach to urbanist issues?

Since I first became State Representative in 2018, I have been a consistent advocate for urbanist issues, both in Harrisburg and back at home. I am seeking your endorsement again this year because our values, advocacy work, and my legislative agenda are aligned — and because I hope to continue this work alongside 5th Square and its members.

Although it is still unclear if I will face one, two, or no opponents this year — I know with certainty that I will be the only urbanist on the ballot in my race. This is also why I am confident that my campaign will succeed, because I know that our community also shares in our vision for this city.

Thank you for all of the work you have done and continue to do in pursuit of progress. I am grateful to have earned your support in the past, and I would be honored to receive your endorsement and support once again.

I look forward to hearing back from you and hope to attend one of your meetings soon. In the meantime, please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions about my responses or wish to discuss any of these issues further!

Thank you for completing our questionnaire! 5th Square members look forward to learning more about your candidacy.

Policy responses will be published at www.5thsq.org — contact/financial data will not be published.