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Moe Handel

Sustainability Questions for the 2021 Needham Select Board Candidates

1- Although climate change is a global issue, it has very real local impacts (e.g.: severe weather, air quality, and health). Where does our climate crisis rank for you on our Town's priorities? Please share your personal and and/or professional experiences working in this area, if any.

This ranks high and is one of my personal priorities for the Town. The climate crisis threatens our sustainability, and I support reducing, and ultimately eliminating, our dependency on fossil fuels. I was an early supporter of Needham's ultimately-successful effort to become a Green Community. I supported our Board's adoption of energy efficient and environmentally sound operations for the Town, residents and businesses. On a personal level, I have installed solar panels on my home along with a solar battery, and drive an electric car.

2- What specific measures will you advocate for in your first year on the Select Board, to continue Needham's great achievements like the [12-acre solar array on our capped landfill](#) and our [Green Community designation](#)?

This is not my first year on the board. I will continue my efforts to support solar solutions for Town operations, and for the increased availability of charging stations for both the public and the Town's fleet. I support the construction of solar canopies in Town and school parking areas. I will continue advocating for clean energy/solar capability in new construction, and in retrofitting as appropriate for older Town buildings.

3- The Commonwealth has adopted aggressive plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Next Generation Climate Bill currently under debate on Beacon Hill ([S.13 - AN ACT CREATING A NEXT-GENERATION ROADMAP FOR MASSACHUSETTS CLIMATE POLICY](#)) would codify a roadmap to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, with 2030 and 2040 targets along the way. As a Select Board member, would you interpret this law as conferring any responsibility on our Town? How will you help Needham rise to meet the responsibility you see, if any?

Any state-mandated targets will require towns to participate in the effort. Irrespective of the law, however, I believe that we all have a responsibility to strive meaningfully to meet net-zero emissions. I would certainly be supportive of meeting realistic targets, but I will reserve judgment on specific solutions until the state's targets are defined. Our efforts must be guided by our capacity to make realistic adjustments to meet those time lines.



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4- A number of our peer Towns (including Wellesley, Weston, Lexington, Newton, and Concord) have prioritized sustainability, developing Climate Action Plans and applying resources (committees, dedicated staff) focused on it. These communities understand that savings can help offset costs.

A: Do you think the time has come for Needham to implement a similar structure to prioritize sustainability? If yes, what do you envision? Paid staff dedicated to sustainability? A standing Town committee?

We are already applying some resources to this issue with current positions and well qualified personnel. I have met with sustainability officials from other towns, and am also open to establishing a specific sustainability position in our Town organization.

B: Would you support the Town of Needham formulating a Climate Action Plan?

Yes - I do believe that the Town should be developing a Climate Action Plan. This plan should involve the appropriate Town bodies – including the Planning Board, the School Committee, and Permanent Public Building Committee, along with the relevant town departments – DPW, Community Development, and Economic Advisory Committee. I would note that we should also seek creative expertise from Olin College, and work with organizations like the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission and others to explore regional solutions and economies-of-scale.

5 - Needham has an impressive capital plan for both renovating existing buildings and constructing new ones. Although the new Sunita Williams School has solar photovoltaic panels, those were added due to favorable construction costs - they were not incorporated into the initial design. Likewise, energy efficiency is part of the design for the new Public Safety buildings, but they are not designed to be “green buildings.”

A: As our elected representative, will you actively support prioritizing sustainability best practices in our design, construction, and procurement processes, including for projects already in our capital plan? For example: Would you support requiring that solar PV be incorporated into the design for, and be installed on, all new municipal buildings where technically feasible?

Yes – although there is an initial cost issue, I believe that it can be overcome by factoring the long-term energy savings into the municipal operating budget.

B: Would you support a net zero energy use target for new municipal buildings?

I would, and believe that they can be cost-effective over time (see above).



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6- What role can the Select Board take to encourage or require sustainable design and construction for residential and commercial buildings? Please describe your vision.

I do support the goal, though I also think we need to develop a full understanding of what the “ask” is for this. I believe that the Select Board can and should explore ways to achieve it by developing a consensus as to the benefits – both to the environment and the users of these buildings. There may be density bonuses and/or fast track permitting that could be brought to bear, and we should be looking for other incentives for sustainable development.

7- As the Town works to cut carbon emissions and help Needham residents adapt to the damaging effects of climate change, what can the Select Board do to ensure that the process is fair and benefits all residents regardless of income, race, or ethnicity?

I believe that every policy or regulation we adopt needs to be vetted for the effect it will have on social and racial equity. This includes being more sensitive to the placement and impact of infrastructure projects, and encouraging neighborhoods in the town to understand and participate in and benefit from the process.

8 - Please address anything else you'd like to include or let voters know why voting for you is a vote for our sustainable future.

Sustainability isn't just about power generation. It also means that we need to plan forward and readjust our infrastructure, building, drainage, and other standards to cope with increasingly frequent climate related events. Town planning should not focus only on immediate goals, but also build in the resiliency we will need as conditions change. This requires working with surrounding towns to make sure that we are part of a comprehensive regional approach to dealing with the consequences of climate change.

Please return your answers to the questions to Michael Greis (mgreis@comcast.net) by **March 9th, 2021**. You may edit this document, create your own, or provide the (numbered) answers in the body of an e-mail. If you have any questions, please reach out to Michael by e-mail at mgreis@comcast.net or by phone at **781 559-4623**.

Thank you!