25 March 2022

Dear Artie,

On behalf of Green Needham Collaborative, thank you for stepping forward as a candidate for the Needham Planning Board.

Green Needham is a volunteer organization that for 15 years has worked with the Town, as well as with businesses, community groups, and houses of worship, to ensure a sustainable future for Needham. We are submitting questions to the candidates for Planning Board to ask for your thoughts and ideas about sustainability and also to highlight the crucial environmental issues that will be coming up in the near future.

Given the climate crisis, the next 10 years may turn out to be the most important decade of the 21st century. In an effort to avoid the worst effects of climate change, Massachusetts is setting ambitious goals to drastically cut carbon emissions by 2030, on the way to zero net emissions by 2050. For cities and towns, this undertaking will bring not only challenges but also tremendous opportunities as we transition away from fossil fuels in a just, fair way that benefits **all** residents.

The Planning Board will play an increasingly important role in our response to climate change. Buildings produce over 1/3 of all greenhouse gas emissions. Buildings and land use choices have long lives. How, where and what we build now will sets our trajectory for decades.

I’ve attached a custom Word document with the questions. **We would appreciate receiving your answers by Friday, April 1st.** I invite you to provide your answers between each question, adding as much space as you need. If you prefer, you may send numbered answers back in a separate document or an e-mail. We want this to be as easy as possible for you at a busy time. We will publish the answers – as provided by the candidates – on our website.

For more background, please browse our website -- [www.greenneedham.org](http://www.greenneedham.org) -- and certainly feel free to use us as an informational resource. And if you have any questions about the questions themselves, don't hesitate to contact me! You can reach me by e-mail at [**mgreis@comcast.net**](mailto:mgreis@comcast.net) or by phone at **781 559-4623**.

***We look forward to receiving your answers by April 1st.***

With our thanks, 

Michael Greis

Chair, Green Needham Collaborative

**Sustainability Questions for the April 2022 Needham Planning Board Candidates**

1 - Buildings represent up to 40% of greenhouse gas emissions.  Addressing the climate crisis requires transitioning to net-zero buildings and increasing the resilience of our built and natural environments.  What are your priorities for the Planning Board to help achieve those transitions?

As I stated in numerous Zoom meetings and during my Needham Cable Interview, the time to act is now. Every building built will exist for the next 50 to 100 years and every blade of grass covered will likely never see the day of light again.

* All new public buildings need to be as close to Net-Zero as possible. The money we invest in our building’s efficiency creates resiliency and will ultimately prove to be a wise economic investment, plus the environmental benefit.
* Needham needs a Tree Bylaw, like towns around us, where developers can not clear cut a lot of all trees without consideration of what trees can be saved. Homeowners would also have restrictions as well regards to tree removal.  
  Just because that is the way it has been, does not mean that is how the process should continue. That is in fact one of the reasons we are in this environmental crisis.
* All commercial buildings over a certain size should be LEED Gold Certifiable.  
  All residential buildings need to be pushed to a higher standard than present.
* Permitting processes should not make building to these standards a more onerous task.

2 - Massachusetts is developing an opt-in net zero energy code.  While the specifics are still under discussion, there is a growing consensus that requiring new construction to be fossil-fuel free net zero energy should be a requirement.

Would you support this requirement?

* I support the concept and goal, but it is not as simple as saying all buildings should be built to be fossil-fuel-free.
* To be fossil-fuel free the building would have to either be producing all its own electricity, via solar, or have sourced its electricity from a Solar Farm.
* Almost all electricity currently supplied to commercial or residential buildings use fossil-fuel as the power source. This means that even if the building used NO fossil-fuel on site, it is in fact using fossil-fuel.
* It is highly unlikely that any commercial building will be able to produce all its own electricity on site.
* In order to have enough Solar Farms to offset all fossil-fuel reduction we might very well have to cut down a lot of trees or cover a lot of open fields, farm land, etc. Both of these options have some negative environmental effects.

Are there other elements you feel should be included (or not included) in the final net zero code?

* The state keeps using the word Electrification, which has its benefits. The problem is that the states regulation for solar makes it impossible for any homeowner to produce enough electricity to power their house, if they converted to heat pumps, completely via solar.
* As stated in the main heading of this question, the specifics are unclear and so it is hard to say what should come out.
* This Opt-In Net Zero code would have to lift the Net-Metering Limit and the Net Cap for solar in the state.
* Though Air Source Heat Pumps are beneficial, Ground Source Heat Pumps have a greater capacity to power a house with less electricity. The Opt-In Net Zero code should have further incentives for Ground Source Heat Pumps.
* The ONLY way any building can approach Net-Zero is with very strict insulation codes, which I am highly in favor.

Will you support Needham adopting a net zero code if it meets those requirements?

* Only if it was actually possible to achieve. Needham is not one homogenous community with limitless resources. I would be in favor of the Net-Zero direction which would push insulation requirements, greatly reducing heating and cooling cost.

3 - Installing solar parking canopies currently requires a special permit.  Would you support making this important clean energy option as-of-right?

* There is NO reason why Solar Canopies should require a Special Permit. As-Of-Right makes perfect sense and then they just have to meet normal building setbacks.

4 - Transit-friendly zoning is a tool that can help address climate change and create more diverse and affordable housing.  Needham will have to meet the DHCD Multi-Family Zoning Requirement for MBTA Communities.  How should Needham implement these zoning requirements?

* I think the obvious answer is that Needham needs to analyze exactly what percentage of our current housing falls under the meeting part of the requirement.
* There are four train stops in Needham, it may very well be the fairest to spread the acreage requirement over those four stops. It will not likely be equally spread, but it needs to be part of the discussion.

5 - Teardowns and the size and scale of residential construction are concerns to many Needham residents because of impacts on quality of life, affordability, equity and sustainability. Do you share those concerns?

* I have shared those exact concerns for 20 years or more.

How would you approach addressing this challenge in a way that is fair to all stakeholders?

* How to address the problem which is fair to all stakeholders is the million-dollar question.  
  The town of Wellesley implemented a Large House Review Board, in which if a house went over a certain size, the house plan went before the board and low and behold there house sizes reduced. The thing is if Needham implemented a similar Review Board I do not see that remediating the concerns of affordability, equity, quality of life and sustainability.
* Needham can increase setbacks and FA ratios which would likely have NO impact on selling price. Unfortunately if the house sells at the same price and then is replaced with a new house, even if that house is smaller than what current zoning allows, equity and affordability concerns will not be addressed.
* Related to the question of fairness:  
  To the existing homeowner looking to sell, fairness, might be defined as maximum selling price.  
  To the neighborhood fairness might be defined as fitting in with the existing houses, at least not doubling the house size, which is what is happening now.  
  To the affordability concern, it would be nice if all buyers, not just developers, had a shot at buying the house.
* If a developer is looking to increase housing units on a lot the Planning Board could insist on an Affordability requirement.
* As I stated, this is the million-dollar question. If the community cares enough to create more equity in

6 – The harms from climate change will fall disproportionately on those who can least afford it.  The “Just Transition” is the term used for ensuring that those communities and individuals participate in and benefit from the transition to a net zero economy.  Creating more and varied affordable housing is arguably the most significant contribution Needham can make to the “Just Transition” and is also a community priority.

How will you advance the creation of more affordable housing in Needham?

* I am currently on the Community Preservation Committee, where a year ago we put a priority on funding more Low-Income Housing. We are in fact bringing articles to Needham’s Town Meeting for this exact purpose.
* Creating Community Support for Needham Housing Authorities Capital Plan of increased Deeply Affordable Housing and rehabbing existing housing stock will bring some much-needed dignity to the residence in that housing and will help define Needham as a community with increased commitment to diversity and equity.
* That Deeply Affordable housing stock needs to be of the highest efficiency and as close to Net-Zero as possible.

What specific kinds of housing are your priority?

* My first priority would be to aid in any way to help the Needham Housing Authority achieve there Capital Improvement vision and this will need educating the Needham community of what is needed why it is needed and why the community should care.
* There is talk of adjusting the bylaws of the ADU’s Accessory Dwelling Units to be less restrictive. Any change will have small incremental changes.
* I am a huge believer in Multigenerational Living. If being less restrictive on the ADU bylaws increases the possibility of Mutigenerational Living I would look favorably on it. I am however NOT in favor or removing single family zoning in Needham, as I do not believe that is the best approach to develop a more equitable community in Needham.
* Any new developments should have increase 40b percentages and perhaps even redefining the 40b definition lower income requirement.

7 - Please address anything else you’d like to include or to let voters know how your service as a Planning Board member would further sustainable practices in the Town of Needham.

* I am a believer in true transparency where Planning Board members may not meet in closed door meetings with developers where there is no public record of minutes or recording. People may ask what that has to do with “sustainable practices.?”
* For real progress to be achieved the community must have full trust in the process. They must believe what they are being told by the Planning Board without compromise.
* Closed Door meetings can break that trust, which means any decision by Planning Board to further any goal whatsoever will be met with some doubt.
* Any Doubt increases the possibility of failure.

Please return your answers to the questions to Michael Greis ([mgreis@comcast.net](mailto:mgreis@comcast.net)) by **April 1st, 2022**. You may type you answers in this document, create your own document, 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](mailto:mgreis@comcast.net) or by phone at **781 559-4623**.

Thank you!