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25 March 2022

Dear Justin,

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 -- 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 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



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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?

I would support a study of creating incentives for 'green zoning' giving us the ability to craft local zoning bylaws that emphasize investment in better, more energy - efficient buildings. For example, a 'density bonus' could incentivize developers to exceed the normally allowed floor-to-area ratio.. This would allow for denser residential housing developments in exchange for complying with energy-efficient building standards like LEED, green roofs or other net zero technologies. I support looking at all the options and engaging with Town residents on measures that they would support.

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? Are there other elements you feel should be included (or not included) in the final net zero code? Will you support Needham adopting a net zero code if it meets those requirements?

I encourage the development of an opt-in net zero energy code and would explore adding an incentive to encourage developers and homeowners to increase the probability of participation. Fossil-free energy should be incentivized further and I believe that the town should explore the many ways to go about that through an open, deliberative process. I think it is important that Needham lead on these issues and look forward to working with other parts of the town government and with Needham residents and business owners to develop solutions.

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

I certainly support making solar canopies more accessible so in theory, yes. Each project has a unique set of circumstances and impacts, requiring a thoughtful response which is the purpose behind the special permit process. A more thoughtful response requires additional information of the scenarios because there are multiple impacts that must be considered.

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?

With 175 separate zoning authorities in the MBTA region, each operating in a prisoner's dilemma environment around issues of traffic, density, infrastructure, school costs, and other perceived burdens, individual cities and towns are not going to solve this regional shortfall of housing acting on their own. Constructive engagement is called for, both by Needham directly and in working with other communities to address this housing shortage. For Needham, meeting the draft guideline standard may be workable with moderate increases in density. This must be a town wide effort that extends beyond the planning board.



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Needham, meeting the draft guideline standard may be workable. We have 14 acres that meet the standard already. With moderate increases in density, the draft mandate is obtainable.

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

Teardowns are a very complicated issue, one many towns in our area are facing. It is important to support homeowners to make individual choices while also being cognizant of how development impacts neighborhoods and the community. For many homeowners, their house is their largest individual asset, and I don't want the town to be in a position to harm the financial wellbeing of the residents. I support the planning board looking into the current levels of development and best practices so that we can balance growth and development while preserving the character of the town.

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? What specific kinds of housing are your priority?

Zoning changes do not create large-scale change in a bubble. In terms of important issues such as housing availability and affordability, zoning is a small piece of a large complicated equation. The planning board should examine the problem, look at other towns, and study how others in the region are updating and modernizing their zoning laws to reflect the needs of their community.

Currently, the Planning board is evaluating this through the housing working group and I am excited for the output from the group.

ADU's are one example of a partial solution - it is of small impact but something that the planning board and Town Meeting can do on its own to work towards more flexibility in housing choice and options. I support an evaluation of the current zoning and exploring an option to expand the allowable uses. Increasing affordable housing stock will take a whole-town effort and I look forward to working with residents and town government to create solutions that move the needle forward on this important issue.



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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.

Addressing sustainable practices is a multifaceted complex issue. I believe it starts with the individual, and I take my commitment to combating the climate crisis personally. I take pride in having solar panels on my home and in driving an electric vehicle. There is no simple solution - it will take a whole town, a whole community and frankly the entire state coming together to make incremental changes to "business as usual" to achieve measurable results. I am in this for the long haul and am committed to doing what I can to ensure my children inherit a livable planet.

Please return your answers to the questions to Michael Greis (mgreis@comcast.net) by **April 1st, 2022**. You may type your 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 or by phone at **781 559-4623**.

Thank you!