



[www.greenneedham.org](http://www.greenneedham.org)

25 March 2022

Dear Oscar,

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 set our trajectory for decades.

I've attached a custom Word document with the questions. **We would appreciate receiving your answers by Friday, April 1<sup>st</sup>.** 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 1<sup>st</sup>.***

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 advocate for the town to set the highest building performance standards, driving down carbon footprint and being Net Zero ready (allowing conversion to all electric buildings when readily available), for ALL the public projects they undertake, from schools to public service and administration buildings, including new and renovation projects. This should be the standard that the private sector should also follow for the work in town, which includes commercial, multi-family, single-family and other possible building types. We should adopt the new net zero energy code as soon as it becomes available.

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 think this is an important decision that will need a good information campaign and robust community engagement to fully understand the advantages for the Needham community relative to neighboring towns. This could be a positive differentiator for Needham to consider. It will be important to see what a new administration and the Commonwealth climate initiatives will target as appropriate thresholds for all-electric implementation so we can achieve the 2050 net zero goal.

3 - Installing solar parking canopies currently requires a special permit. Would you support making this important clean energy option as-of-right? I think this is a good idea that I would like to thoroughly consider, understanding lessons learned locally (Newton Library and Newton North High School) and regionally. I would advocate for a comprehensive presentation to the town for discussion, and potentially a vote, on by-right versus special permit.



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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?

This MBTA law is going through a final comment phase and should be issued this summer. I think Needham will need to see the final law, get clarity on our status as either a bus or commuter rail community, and get feedback from DHCD on how they will apply their discretionary approvals when evaluating Needham's existing multi-family housing projects and MF zoning districts. This new law is a real opportunity for Needham to address a significant lack of housing choices with more variety of sizes, prices and housing types. Needham has diverse housing needs that are not being met for our current and future residents, our residents with disabilities, and our seniors. I believe the Needham community needs to analyze how best to reform our zoning by-laws to allow this by-right multi-family housing. This will go a long way to allow Needham to solve its own housing challenges and to contribute to the greater regional housing shortage.

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?

This is a complex issue and there is no silver bullet. We can absolutely see the impact of teardowns has created a diminishing supply of starter homes of reasonable size in town. Rules that curtail or influence the nature of teardown activity are worth exploring to understand the pros and cons relative to our homeowner concerns and the building community. Teardown activity does have a clear negative environmental impact that destroys a marketable small home and usually sees a property lose many, if not all, of the mature trees, replacing them with new construction. Mindful of the desire of most sellers to maximize the sale price, I believe we need to understand what other communities have done with large home dimensional controls on coverage, setbacks and maximum building area (FAR). We should find creative ways to incentivize sellers so that these smaller, more affordable homes get a fair chance in the marketplace without risk to the homeowner to sell at market price.



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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?

Needham needs to consider this issue and determine what kind of community it wants to be. The range of “affordable housing” needs in Needham covers a wide spectrum from deeply affordable subsidized housing to the subsidized housing in 40B developments that are at the upper end of the affordable range. Needham is experiencing increasingly stressed households with an affordability gap (spending more than 30% of income on housing needs). The housing needs assessment just released by the Needham Housing Plan Working Group has highlighted housing challenges for a number of resident groups like our seniors, children with disabilities (who are aging out at 22), and people seeking homes in the Needham Housing Authority serving more deeply affordable households. The long-term financial benefits of more energy efficient housing have been demonstrated and usually with no increase to the initial costs. Multi-family housing has the added advantage of greater energy and land-use efficiencies that benefit the whole community. The long-term financial benefit to households living on the edge of the affordability gap is perhaps the most compelling reason to target the housing needs for our underserved and more financially at-risk residents.

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 would immediately advocate that we fully engage the broadest representation of our Needham community to present and discuss what a Green community commitment requires – this may be coordinated with the climate action plan outreach? What are the challenges and opportunities we face and the necessary actions we need to consider taking? We need to fully understand the facts and examine examples as a community to confirm this as a collective goal that will underpin so many other decisions we face as a town.

I think our transportation ecosystem also needs to plan for the environmental and community benefits of an electric future and the possibility of enhanced, town-wide alternative modes of transit. MSome of the benefits could include greater convenience for residents, particularly our transit challenged residents, and to drive down GHG and our vehicular dependence and ultimately drive us toward being better stewards of the environment.

Please return your answers to the questions to Michael Greis ([mgreis@comcast.net](mailto: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](mailto:mgreis@comcast.net) or by phone at **781 559-4623**.

Thank you!