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15 March 2023

Dear Rob,

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 has set 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 Thursday, March 23rd.** 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 process to be as easy as possible for you at a busy time. We will publish your answers 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 March 23rd.

With our thanks,

Michael Greis
Chair, Green Needham Collaborative



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Sustainability Questions for the April 2023 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 believe commercial buildings and major project developers need to do more, and that starts with creating design standards within our bylaws with specific environmental requirements. Designing to meet net-zero building and resiliency in our environment can take many forms. It's important to look at each project and design them to be flexible, economically-managed, and right-sized for Needham. It is also important to include key design strategies in order to improve indoor air quality, minimize grid dependency, and meet high performance design initiatives, preferably LEED Gold or higher.

In addition, Needham should prioritize the use of sustainable materials in projects. Thoughtful building designs should have the longest life possible and include elements of green buildings such as green roofs, solar, and greywater systems. Landscape planning should be focused on native vegetation that requires less water and lower maintenance. Preservation of green space should be a priority, and Needham should adopt a tree preservation policy that will protect mature trees during demolition and development. In conjunction with this, Needham might consider establishing a "tree bank" which would ensure that if mature trees are removed, a deposit is made into a town-administered fund to plant new trees.

Ultimately, in order for net-zero to be realized, we must encourage Eversource to prioritize upgrading the grid infrastructure across Needham. I will work with all stakeholders in town to further realize this goal.

2 - Massachusetts has introduced a new opt-in net zero energy code for new construction. There is a growing consensus that communities should require new construction be fossil-fuel free, net zero energy. Would you support this requirement? Will you support Needham adopting the new net zero code?

As an early adopter of solar energy and electric vehicles, I support electrification in many aspects of our daily lives. I am a big proponent of geo-thermal heating, and support and encourage its adoption on a larger scale. In order to achieve wider adoption of fossil fuel free buildings, our energy distribution grid must be ready to accommodate it. With thoughtful architectural design, it is very possible and practical to build new homes that are fossil free. Builders and architects need to commit to using solar wherever possible and adhering to strict insulation values.

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

Absolutely. Parking lots represent a substantial underutilized resource regarding solar energy. The town should adopt a bylaw that allows these solar canopies by right, which in turn would not only produce power, but also reduce snow removal costs, keep the stormwater runoff cleaner, and have the added benefit of providing shade to the vehicles parked beneath them. Any bylaw adopted would need to be reviewed by the building and fire departments. To address resident feedback, public hearings should be held before it is codified. It is important to communicate and educate the community, study what other towns have done, and look at what is necessary in order to protect our town's environmental resources.



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4 - 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?

I share concerns around the size and scale of houses on lots that leave very little green space. Needham did go through a Large House Review process and adopted bylaw changes in 2017, which created some benefits, but it is time to do more. Needham should consider modifying the current zoning and use elements of Wellesley's large house review process as a guide. We should restart the discussion in earnest, and bring all stakeholders together, to balance the equity, affordability and sustainability of any housing bylaw changes.

5 – The harms from climate change will fall disproportionately on those who can least afford it. “Just Transition” is the term used for ensuring that all 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?

The Planning Board needs to facilitate the zoning changes required for the Needham Housing Authority Master Plan, adding deeply affordable housing units. Needham should prioritize Independent Living and Affordable Housing. If we could provide a large enough quantity of Independent Living Units, seniors who are staying in their current homes due to a lack of affordable condominium and apartment options, could then have the opportunity to downsize and stay in town.

Teardowns continue to deplete the stock of small and midsize homes available for purchase in town. Any bylaw change which could reduce the teardown quantity would maintain downsizing opportunities. The existing ADU bylaw should be broadened. The definition of who can live in an ADU needs to be expanded beyond family and “caregiver”. I also support the vote that Town Meeting cast in 2021 related to the Avery Zoning overlay district, to allow for Independent Living and Affordable Housing. Our Town Meeting members voted to approve a specific use case for that property and the spirit of that agreement should be implemented. It is important that the Planning Board follows through with what is approved by Town Meeting.



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

If elected to the Planning Board, I would look at any special permit opportunity to empower the Board to set a higher level of efficiency standards. If the economics of a project allow the increased energy efficiency of buildings, it should be a goal to build to Gold or Platinum LEED standards. I would seek opportunities to replace fossil fuels on projects with Air Source Heat Pumps or Geothermal Heat Pumps. I would encourage the creation of green space beyond minimums. This would certainly help the environment, reduce our heat deserts, improve groundwater infiltration, carbon capture, and positively affect air quality. I would never hesitate to use my position on the Board as a platform for education and advocacy to improve our town's environmental quality..

Please return your answers to the questions to Michael Greis (mgreis@comcast.net) by **March 23rd, 2023**. 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!