



## My Responses to the Newton Parent/Educator Collaborative City Councilor Candidate Survey

### Do you support the Mayor's "Booster Stabilization Fund"? What are its strengths and what should change?

The City Council rejected the Mayor's proposed "Booster Stabilization Fund" on October 16<sup>th</sup>. Councilors expressed a variety of reasons for their opposition, but most were of the opinion that one-time funds should be held in a more liquid way, the better to respond to changing NPS needs as they arise. The Mayor's "Booster Stabilization Fund" would have tied up the funds for many years into the future. If the "Booster Stabilization Fund" was indeed an effective way to provide additional funding to the Newton Public Schools, I wonder why a similar concept which was proposed earlier wasn't acknowledged or adopted at the time. *If elected to the City Council, I intend to monitor very closely and challenge how the administration handles public funds to increase transparency.*

### What do you view as the relationship between new development (housing, commercial) and the schools?

One of the biggest failures of recent City administrations, in my view, is how those with the most power to prevent it have allowed Newton's commercial tax base to be eroded. Commercial properties are taxed at almost twice the rate of residential properties, and they don't generate costs to the taxpayer in terms of school enrollments and most services. Commercial properties and businesses are fiscal net positive and are critical for subsidizing the high cost of providing an excellent public school system. *By facilitating the preferences of real estate investment groups and developers, and encouraging redevelopment of higher-density housing complexes, even on commercially zoned land, recent administrations have hobbled Newton's ability to fund our public schools adequately.*

The current VCOD zoning plan promoted by the Administration and its majority on the City Council (including my opponents) would upzone Newton to allow for some 15,000 additional housing units, a 46% percent increase in housing units and population. This far exceeds the 8330 units required by the State's MBTA Communities Act. I agree with the nine City Councilors, the minority bloc, who oppose the VCOD plan and believe Newton should upzone for only the 8330 units required by the State, before considering anything more. Those 8330 units would already represent a 25% increase in Newton's housing units and population. Not one parking space is required in the currently conflated VCOD + MBTA zoning proposal. No additional subsidized affordable housing is required beyond Newton's existing Inclusionary Zoning in the current proposal. Most of the units that will be built will be high-density, high-priced rental units, and vulnerable existing residents will be displaced as real estate investor groups demolish existing village center buildings and adjacent residential structures to build luxury rental units. Small businesses will be displaced and will be unable to afford to return.

The Administration, its planning staff, high-priced consultants, and majority on the City Council (including my two opponents) support the combined VCOD+MBTA upzoning proposal. I do not. They believe that the creation of thousands more high-priced apartments alone will make housing prices fall, even though

that approach has never worked in any desirable housing market and is widely discredited by economists. If elected, I will work for real affordable housing, and pathways to home ownership for low-income and middle-class households alike.

*Furthermore, there has been no attempt to bring Newton residents and teachers into the upzoning process in any meaningful way.* The Administration and its majority on the City Council have refused to estimate the buildout from the transformational changes they are advocating, and there has been no analysis of the likely impacts on traffic, parking, infrastructure, schools, services, taxes, or how Newton could pay to provide these things to thousands more households. Newton already has a shortage of playing fields and facilities for our students. Where would we find the space for more schools, playing fields and facilities? How could we pay for it all with our shrinking commercial tax base? *How can we expect our teachers to serve even more students, with fewer resources and no space? If elected, I will work hard to make sure that these questions are addressed now so that we are prepared to respond, not wait until after we are confronted with these challenges.*

**Please share your thoughts on the national teacher shortage, and how it impacts Newton's ability to attract and retain strong educators. Does a city councilor have a role? What is it?**

Teachers have suffered greatly these past few years. The pandemic put them and our students under a tremendous amount of stress, with the attendant risks of illness, lost learning, and emotional and psychological distress. In addition, the growing polarization in our national discourse has had an especially destructive impact on schools, which are frequently the objects of attack in culture wars and political posturing. It's no wonder teachers are burned out, and many have left the profession.

*I think we need to invest in our teachers, support them and value them, so they will stay here and develop their skills and give their best to our students, as we do our best for them. The City Council has a limited role, but we can pay closer attention to NPS funding and transparency around that, and demand better.*

**Operating overrides help ensure the health of our schools. What is your plan for and role in ensuring successful overrides?**

Operating overrides are challenging because many Newton residents are on fixed incomes or low incomes and can barely manage to pay their property taxes already. No one wants to put an impossible burden on vulnerable residents that could lead to their displacement.

*Therefore, the City leadership needs to make a compelling case for additional taxes and have a high degree of certainty that an override will pass. That requires significant outreach and engagement with our residents before the override is proposed. Our current leadership failed to do this.*

If an override is proposed primarily to improve the quality of education and our citizens are convinced that the funds cannot be obtained in another way, I believe that the majority of voters, including myself, would support it.

**The current contract offers teachers a COLA of 2% or less. NPS Unit C employees report a non-living wage. Do you believe it is reasonable to expect the NTA to accept the current terms? How can you, as a city councilor, advocate for a fair contract?**

*I have reviewed the PEC website carefully. Based on the comparative data about COLA increases and wages at peer public school systems in Massachusetts, no, I don't believe a COLA of 2% or less is reasonable. As a candidate, and if elected, as a City Councilor at Large – which means all Newton voters from all parts of Newton can vote for me – I will do my best to support Newton teachers as they seek a fair contract and a living wage for all NPS employees.*