



## **CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **May 4, 2021 Annual Town Election**

With Special Town Meeting's overwhelming support of the climate resolution last fall, Westford Climate Action believes that voters would like to know more about candidates' positions on climate issues before making their decisions at the polls on May 4.

WCA emailed questions to all candidates on the May 4<sup>th</sup> ballot. Responses from the candidates are printed as submitted. Those who did not reply are noted.

We thank those candidates who replied for their responses and thank all candidates for running for office in Westford.

### **SELECT BOARD**

Three-year term, vote for one

#### **What is your position on hiring a Sustainability Director for Westford?**

##### **Eric Barber-Mingo**

My position is "let the Westford Clean Energy and Sustainability Committee do its work." That Committee (formerly the "Westford Energy Committee") was given a new charge by the Select Board on February 9, 2021, just two short months ago. That charge includes "identifying short and long-term energy goals; facilitating research studies, projects and collaborations; enlisting the support of residents and businesses; recommending changes to laws and regulations; seeking state and local funding; and recommending any other actions necessary for Westford to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050."

If that Committee recommends the hiring of a Sustainability Director, and also supports that recommendation with facts that support a conclusion that the hiring is in the best interests of our town, I expect that I would support it as a Select Board Member.

##### **John Cunningham**

While we may have a need in the future, I am not in favor of hiring a Sustainability Director right now. The Clean Energy and Sustainability Committee is gaining momentum and based on what I have seen, and with your involvement, will be able to map out a course of action to get us to zero in 2050. Reporting directly to the Select Board will provide an avenue to act quickly as technology changes and opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint emerge. Hiring a Sustainability Director might logically come from the committee later if circumstances dictate and we can address it at that time.

**Do you support purchasing three hybrid police vehicles in the FY22 budgets? Should the town be transitioning to purchasing only hybrid and electric vehicles for our municipal fleet in the future?**

**Eric Barber-Mingo**

See my response to Question 1. Same approach to the question of transitioning to electric vehicles. I am a firm believer in trusting the smart, dedicated people on town committees that report to the Select Board to do their work and to make good recommendations to the Select Board.

**John Cunningham**

Yes. I support purchasing 3 hybrid police vehicle in the FY22 Budget. Now that it's in the budget it's up to Annual Town Meeting to approve. If it becomes an issue at town meeting, I will support the purchase. The Finance Committee will be reviewing the Budget over the next few weeks. I sense they will support.

Transitioning the entire municipal fleet to either hybrid or electric is a worthy goal that will take time. I could envision a timeline for conversion based on age and mileage of vehicles and targeted for general purpose vehicles first and the heavy duty special-purpose vehicles phased in as technology permits. A plan for charging stations would be included.

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

Three-year term, vote for three

**Although climate change is in the MA frameworks, the frameworks were written several years ago and climate change has become an even more pressing issue. How can the Westford Public Schools build on the frameworks to encourage students to apply the climate science principles they learn in school to decisions they and their families make every day?**

**Avery Rockwell Adam**

Westford Public Schools will continue to encourage our students to be the innovative leaders that they are. They are our future and will continue to take control of climate conservation with help from our nurturing staff and administration. With curriculum enhancements like recycling, composting and water conservation, we are laying the groundwork for change. It must start with our youngest learners with simple activities that will teach students responsibility for the world around them. The School Committee is charged with policy and budget oversight. We will make policy changes and the appropriate creation of new policies to enhance conservation efforts. We will also make sure that spending is controlled and that there is no surplus or waste of materials.

**Kathryn Clear**

Massachusetts is establishing itself as a leader in climate change, having introduced in 2008 the Global Warming Solutions Act. This was followed last month with new and more comprehensive climate change legislation, giving Massachusetts a roadmap for climate

policy. These frameworks set out guidelines for towns and communities around the state in achieving the goal of having net zero emissions by 2050.

With the newly named Clean Energy and Sustainability Committee in Westford and the town adopting the Westford Climate Resolution in October 2020, we now have clear goals to work towards as a town. So, what can Westford Public Schools do to help?

Firstly, we need to start looking at this from two perspectives, climate literacy and climate action.

Much of the current climate education in our schools is done through the science curriculum from Pre-K through to 12th grade. However, there are gaps in our curriculum, with some elementary and middle school grade levels not having climate change science input at all and at the high school level most of the environmental education coming through optional electives. This inconsistency in our curriculum needs to be addressed to create a student population who are climate literate. Along with educating our students about understanding the science behind climate change, we also need to encourage more climate action in our schools.

One of the best tools in helping students put climate science principles into action is to model the behaviors as a school community needed to start adapting in our homes. Currently this is done on a school-by-school basis, with initiatives developed by individual schools. Creating district wide action programs gives the opportunity to establish consistency and work collaboratively with the town to achieve our 2050 goal.

One such initiative could see all schools focus on the 5 R's of Zero Waste and create a common understanding of how to implement these actions in our schools and homes. While we commonly talk about Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, the addition of Refuse and Rot concepts to staff and students is important. Putting these principles into daily action in schools will create positive future habits for our students. Creating school composting programs, refusing/reducing the use of plastic in our schools or adopting natural or plant-based resources in our classrooms are just some ways that we can put that climate action to work, and model the behavior for our students so they can see theory in practice!

Westford Public Schools should also engage with National Environmental Education Week. By creating and hosting district wide events that engage our students, staff, and community, we can spotlight these climate change principles to improve our understanding and engagement of these issues.

These are just some opportunities that I see for the school community and school committee to collaborate and work towards. Should I be elected, I would welcome the opportunity to work closely with Westford Climate Action Group on these and other initiatives to achieve our Net Zero emissions for 2050 and secure a brighter future for Westford in years to come.

### **Meghan O'Connell**

This is certainly a pressing issue, but I think the role of the school committee in how to encourage students to apply climate science specifically is limited. Rather, what I would

suggest is that the school committee could encourage at a policy level that curriculum be developed to encourage critical thinking skills and develop greater awareness of how choices made on an individual, community, state, national, and even international level often have wide-ranging effects.

### **Christopher Sanders**

Just as we expect our schools to teach our kids how to care for their bodies in health class, and to be responsible citizens in civics class, we should also expect our schools to teach our students to be thoughtful stewards of our planet. And just like with health and civics, environmental and climate education should be integrated into the different disciplines and at all grade levels. How the curriculum addresses man-made climate change should obviously depend on the grade level. One can imagine that age-appropriate books, films, and hands-on climate science projects could be used for students of almost all ages. Our older students can dive deeper with research projects and volunteering.

I am especially interested in teaching our children (and our adults) the environmental impacts of our everyday lives and of our economy, as this often is invisible to the average person. Most of us don't have a true understanding of our [ecological footprint](#), and the threat it can pose to the limited natural resources on our planet. Furthermore, when we teach economics to our students, we should be helping them to understand that, in most cases, the prices we pay for goods and services do not generally reflect the ecological costs that are incurred in making and delivering those products. Lastly, we should be teaching our students environmental justice, as we know that the impacts of climate change are not born by all groups equally.

### **Steven Wilkins**

No response received.

### **Mingquan Zheng**

Human activities have a profound impact on this planet, conscience choices must be made to ensure that this planet is sustainable for future generations.

There are production and consumption sides to consider when looking at energy issues, and US also needs to learn from other countries as well.

On the production side, it needs long term policy and capital investment to expand more renewable sources which will help reduce carbon footprint; however, it needs to also be recognized that renewable sources like Solar/Wind are limited by weather and locations and will only be supplemental to energy production. As being trained as a nuclear physicist, I emphasize that nuclear energy provides energy without carbon footprints, and must be brought back on the table. After all, the entire solar system is powered by nuclear fusion inside the sun which lasts for billions of years already.

When I was visiting in China, I saw small size solar panels on almost every single rooftop enough to power hot water for an entire family, and along the river banks, small size wind turbine (with blades only a few feet long) in residential neighborhood without generating noises; those are innovative approaches can be applied, and every small step helps! Those

can be done immediately while waiting for giant solar farms and wind turbines which take forever to be approved and built (and wasting decades in the process!).

On the consumption side, the school is teaching Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle and this needs to be in everyday life inside schools and in family homes. When I first came to the US I was astonished by the waste and consumption here. Reduce means that be conscientious and frugal, and no need to buy stuff you don't need, and reduce square footage a person really needs. Simple things also can be done in schools and families to reduce energy consumption is to turn the thermostat down in the winter and put on extra layers; in summer there isn't much need for air conditioning in the northeast, just open the window to let fresh air in. Many of us grew up with neither heat nor AC just fine. Reuse means don't just throw away stuff. I don't normally throw away single use utensils or ziploc bags but rather wash and reuse them. We should teach our kids and community to reuse stuff as much as possible to its maximum life, and repair stuff instead of buying new. Recycle needs to get more incentivized, and other countries are doing a better job on this like sorting different materials for recycling into different buckets. What I also notice is that for people to go through the recycle bins and sell for money, they do a much better job of cleaning up and make sure things are recyclable than curbside recycling. Maybe some kind of innovative approach can be done here so that we don't have to pay the recycling company for sorting and trash fees. It is much easier to talk the talk, but it is even more important to walk the walk and practice the 3Rs in our daily lives.

## **LIBRARY TRUSTEES**

Three-year term, vote for two

**What energy conservation and greenhouse gas emissions mitigation measures have been taken into consideration in the plans for the renovation of and addition to the library?**

### **Marianne Fleckner**

It definitely was encouraging to witness last year's Special Town Meeting when the voters overwhelmingly passed the Climate Resolution!

In a recent conversation with our Project Manager for the J.V. Fletcher Library expansion project, she had noted that code will continue to change and advance up until we start the project. With that said, the Library Trustees, along with the Director and all other involved parties will continue to make sure the design is compliant; we want to ensure there is enough flexibility to use new HVAC and climate technology. The current plan is to use both gas and electric, and that may be one of the areas that is changed/advanced to ensure compliance with energy conservation and greenhouse gas emissions.

The building will be designed using LEED and other green building practices including bicycle racks, low flow bathroom fixtures, energy efficient mechanical systems, low emitting materials, occupancy sensors, materials containing recycled content, high efficiency windows and maximizing daylighting opportunities.

We will purchase local building products when available.

Additionally, this project is anticipated to undergo commissioning by a third party to ensure all systems are optimized from an energy conservation and greenhouse gas emissions standpoint.

### **Alisha Hillam**

Promoting a green approach to the library expansion project is an important priority for me as a Trustee. The library expansion plan presently includes LEED and other green measures such as bicycle racks, maximizing daylight opportunities, low-flow bathroom fixtures, high-efficiency windows, energy-efficient mechanical systems, materials containing recycled content, local building product when available, occupancy sensors, and low emitting materials. The south- and common-facing façade is meant to remain historic in appearance, which means no solar panels there.

It is worth noting that there will be at least a seven-year gap between submitting our grant application in 2017 and receiving our grant announcement, and we expect to refine and finalize design features when the grant is received, including taking advantage of most-current green practices, and adapting to new HVAC and climate technology, and to have the project evaluated by a third party to ensure that these systems are optimized.

## **PLANNING BOARD**

Five-year term, vote for one

### **What zoning bylaw changes do you support that would help Westford reach the goal of becoming a net zero community by 2050?**

#### **Katherine Hollister**

Town staff and the Planning Board are continually reviewing Westford's Zoning bylaws a subdivision rules and regulations to bring them up to date with current best land-use practices as well as state and federal policies and regulations. One example that applies to environmental health is the bylaw approved in 2018 regulating large scale solar energy systems. We plan to follow this up with a bylaw for small-scale solar energy systems. Other possibilities include:

- Ways to encourage solar panels on already-disturbed land discourage placement on forested land or other open space.
- Technical regulations regarding low impact, or low energy, best practices
- Update our Open Space Residential Development Bylaw and Flexible Development Bylaw to encourage smaller and/or energy efficient homes.
- Revise the Hazardous Waste Bylaw
- Promote no-clear zones in our site plan criteria

The Planning Board is responsible for zoning bylaws and planning goals. The board reviews site plans mainly to ensure that roadway design, stormwater design, and other details are consistent with standard engineering practices. While becoming a net zero community is a

worthwhile goal, the Planning Board cannot require measures that deprive land owners of their legal property rights. In addition, the Town is approaching maximum build-out, so any changes will affect only a small portion of our developed parcels.

## **BOARD OF HEALTH**

Three-year term, vote for one

**Climate change is a serious threat to public health. What can the Board of Health do to help Westford transition to a clean energy future?**

**Joanne Belanger**

No response received.

## **HOUSING AUTHORITY**

Five-year term, vote for one

**What can the Housing Authority do to promote clean energy and reduce fossil fuel use in the housing units it controls?**

**Carol Engel**

No response received.