

# Board of Selectmen

## 1 Year Seat

1 for 1 year

### Matthew Cohen

Precinct – 2

e-mail address – [cohen4lexington@gmail.com](mailto:cohen4lexington@gmail.com)

phone number – 781-640-8362

### Community Activities

- Worked in the Lexington Town Manager's Office and Tax Collector's Office
- Served on the Lexington Human Services Committee
- Worked as a Research and Budget Director at the Massachusetts State House
- Currently actively working with groups promoting greater diversity and inclusion in town, including: LexPride, CALex, and the Association of Black Citizens of Lexington
- Serving as a mentor to students at Northeastern University and Merrimack College
- Regular participant in the Lexington Community Coalition Coffees

### League Question for Board of Selectmen candidates:

**How would you balance pressures for increased municipal spending against the need to limit the tax burden on residential properties?**

The concern that I have heard from residents most often is that it is difficult to afford living here, particularly for people on modest or fixed incomes. I believe it is the responsibility of elected officials to build a budget that does as much as possible for as little as possible. I am the candidate for the one-year seat who has spent his career learning how to do that and doing it on real budgets. I have extensive formal education and real-life experience on budgets and fiscal policy. I learned policy evaluation and implementation, earning a dual BA at Brandeis, an ALM at Harvard and a PhD at Northeastern Universities, all in the field of political science. I worked for over seven years as a Research and Budget Director at the Massachusetts State House, and at the local level in the Lexington Town Manager's and Tax Collector's Offices. These experiences taught me how to build a budget that supports necessary programs while eliminating waste. I will carefully evaluate every proposed town expenditure to ensure we provide services in a cost-effective manner.

When working on a budget, among the first questions I would always ask was if a program was necessary. If so, I would want to know if it was likely to produce the expected benefits, or, if it were seeking renewed funding, if it was already producing the desired benefits. And we must

always ask if we could achieve what we seek for less. I will not hesitate to support necessary programs, but I will always consider the impact on taxpayers before supporting any program.

I would do the same as a Selectman. We should generally avoid overrides as they place additional burdens on residents, and I am pleased there have been fewer in recent years. This is a trend that should continue. But there are circumstances where they will be needed. Our town budgets must ensure that we are providing people with the high-quality services we have all come to know and expect. This takes money, and Lexington is a high tax town. I will not hesitate to support funding for necessary programs.

The largest upcoming expense will likely be for building a new high school. I do believe we need to rebuild or renew Lexington High School, and this is deeply important to me as I am the only candidate whose children will go through a new high school. All options must be considered and deeply evaluated for short and long-term costs and outcomes. We need to address funding before a final project is approved by beginning to set aside money now. Lexington can also work with the state government to acquire money to assist with the project. My time at the State House makes me well positioned to help Lexington get as much money as possible from the state. When considering the design of a new school we should build in sustainability measures that can help offset costs, including, but not limited to solar paneling and efficient smart HVAC systems. However, offsets from smart sustainability measures will not cover all of our costs.

One step Lexington can take, more generally, that would help us best spend our revenues is to focus on finalizing a new comprehensive plan. Such a plan will allow the town to utilize resources in an effective, sustainable, and responsible manner. It is difficult to prioritize projects, handle existing debt, or decide which programs need funding without a long-term plan. As a Selectman, I would work hard to get the comprehensive plan complete so that we can make the best planning and funding decisions. Completing this plan will allow the town to save taxpayer money in the near, medium, and long terms through improved allocation of resources, ensuring we gain access to state funding, and obtaining grant money. Given upcoming capital projects (including the high school and possible new police station), the town should also develop a separate comprehensive capital projects plan to address how to fund these projects.

We can also find ways to help offset our residential tax burden. One way to do so is by increasing commercial development in a thoughtful and sustainable manner that reflects the character of our community. Lexington needs strategic economic development that will increase our commercial tax base, with developments in carefully selected locations and of a kind, such as technology businesses, that pay the highest in tax revenue and provide jobs of the kind best suited to many Lexington residents. This will bring in additional revenue, thus allowing the town to limit or reduce what residents are asked to pay. All of this can be achieved while maintaining the overall high quality of life in our community.

## **Mark Sandeen**

Precinct 6

mark@marksandeen.com

(781) 863-8784

### **Community Activities**

- Chair, Sustainable Lexington Committee for 8 years
  - Won Commonwealth's Leading by Example award last year
- Chair, Community Choice Aggregation Task Force
  - 100% renewable electricity saving \$3 million for 10,000 customers
- Member, Solar Task Force
  - Solar energy systems generating \$600K in revenue per year
- Co-chair, Getting to Net Zero Emissions Task Force
  - Getting to Net Zero Emissions Plan approved by Board of Selectmen
- Proposed healthy, 100% renewable, new school designs that will save \$500K a year, approved by Board of Selectmen and School Committee
- Chair, Lex Drive Electric program
  - Doubled number of electric cars in Lexington last year, while saving residents up to \$7K on purchase of new electric cars
- Co-founder, Interfaith Garden (now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year)
  - Hundreds of volunteers delivered 14,000 lbs. of produce to Food Pantry
- Chair, Building a Better Future
  - Unanimous approval of Stretch Energy Code
- Author, All Things Sustainable in Colonial Times Magazine (6 years)
- Founding Member, LexFarm
- Member, Hancock Church & LexGWAC
- Teach science classes at Diamond Middle School
- Judge at Lexington High School Science Fairs

### **League Question for Board of Selectmen candidates:**

**How would you balance pressures for increased municipal spending against the need to limit the tax burden on residential properties?**

I am running for Board of Selectman because I am committed to achieving the goals we have for both educational excellence and fiscal responsibility. We are at a critical time for Lexington, as we contemplate making the largest investment of a generation, perhaps as much as \$300 or \$400 million in a new high school building. There are two primary ways to address this issue. The first is to create new sources of commercial tax revenue and the second is to reduce the cost of operating our schools. By combining these two initiatives, I believe we can deliver a world-class high school without increasing the tax burden on our residential property owners.

Lexington is recognized as one of the most desirable communities in the Commonwealth, in large part because of our commitment to delivering exemplary educational excellence. And the Town's budget reflects those values with roughly 75% of our budget dedicated to our schools. We spend almost \$150 million a year on school related salary, benefit, and health insurance expenses.

One of the benefits of living in such a highly desirable community is that the value of our homes has increased dramatically over the last 30 years. Unfortunately, commercial property values have not kept pace with residential property values. The Town's 1987 Annual Report shows that commercial properties provided 31% of our tax revenue, while the 2017 Annual Report shows that commercial properties now only provide 17% of our tax revenue. One of the reasons for this trend is that about 30 years ago, the Town passed restrictive commercial zoning by-laws that discouraged commercial property investment.

Our Economic Development Advisory Council has been working on these issues for several years now. I agree with their recommendation that our priority should be to attract more biotech and pharmaceutical companies to the area, companies that pay double the taxes per square foot compared to normal office space tenants, while employing dramatically fewer employees per square foot.

For the last three years, as part of the Getting to Net Zero Emissions task force, I've had the opportunity to work with three of the largest commercial property owners in Lexington to understand their needs and desires. These commercial property owners are looking for Lexington to provide mixed use zoning that would allow for restaurants, coffee shops, and retail stores to be sited within walking distance of their properties and provide increased public transportation to the area.

With reasonable zoning changes it should be possible to double the square feet of commercial office space while also doubling the tax revenue per square foot and limiting or even reducing traffic impacts. Accomplishing those goals could raise enough money to pay for our new high school – thus relieving the burden on our residential property owners. Of course, none of these changes will happen overnight, but if we start now, we will see a meaningful increase in our commercial tax revenue by the time the new high school is approved and built.

We should also consider how to revitalize our retail business districts in Lexington center and throughout the town. Many residents have expressed their desire for more vibrant retail shopping areas that would support a broader range of shops. The harsh reality is that retail shops aren't getting the foot traffic they need to pay their rent.

One way of addressing that issue would be to consider increasing the height restrictions on buildings in the center of town. Landlords would then have new sources of revenue for their properties – from the upper floor tenants. This could potentially allow lower rents for retail storefronts, and those new upper floor tenants could become new sources of foot traffic and

revenue for the shops in town. Revitalized retail commercial districts would also increase our commercial tax revenues while providing much-desired amenities for our residents.

Another way to lower the burden on residential property owners would be to reduce certain town and school operating expenses.

Five years ago the Board of Selectmen requested that I kick off a process to define standards that would guide the Town during the design of our new buildings and schools. I worked closely with the Board of Selectmen, School Committee, and Department of Public Facilities, the Permanent Building Committee and many other stakeholders to create a series of high performance standards designed to achieve the health, energy, and resilience goals we desired. We used those standards to drive the design of the new Hastings School and that process has yielded some amazing results.

The new Hastings School will provide students and teachers with remarkable indoor air quality, while using 50% less energy than a conventionally designed school. This improves student and teacher's health, productivity, cognitive performance and amazingly enough, test scores. It reduces sick days and improves teacher retention. And because we are heating and cooling with a ground source heat pump, the solar energy systems on the roof and parking lot will be able to provide 100% of all the energy Hastings needs to operate.

A conventionally designed school would have spent \$250,000 a year on electricity, but the Hastings solar energy system will reduce that bill to ZERO. In addition, the state provides incentives for solar, heat pumps, and net zero buildings that total \$150,000 a year. That's a \$400K swing in operating costs per year, or \$8 million saved over the next 20 years.

Our new high school is expected to be at least 4 times larger than Hastings School. That means we should be able to reduce the operating costs of the new high school by \$1.6 million a year, while also dramatically improving the health and cognitive performance of our students. That's \$32 million in reduced operating costs over the next 20 years, not including the health and productivity benefits for our teachers and students. What's not to love about that?

If elected Selectmen, I will work to achieve those results **and more** for our students, teachers, residential, and commercial property owners.