

## **League of Women Voters of Lexington**

Election Guide for the March 5, 2018 Lexington municipal election.

### **Moderator**

#### **Deborah Brown**

Precinct: 7

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#### *Community Activities:*

- Former Precinct 7 Town Meeting member (9 years)
- Former Appropriation Committee Member (9 years including stint as Chair)
- Current board member and past president of the Massachusetts Moderators Association

### **Board of Selectmen**

Question for Board of Selectmen candidates: Given the recent federal tax law changes, what are your thoughts about potential changes to municipal taxation?

#### **Jill Hai**

Precinct: 4

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#### *Community Activities:*

- Precinct 4 Town Meeting member, 12 years
- Capital Expenditures Committee 5 years, including 4 as Chair
- Lexington Education Foundation Board Member and Trivia Bee Co-Chair
- Bridge PTA President
- Town Sidewalk Committee Member
- Safe Routes To School Member
- Lexington 300<sup>th</sup> Incorporation Weekend Committee
- Associate Member, Zoning Board of Appeals
- Temple Isaiah Trustee

#### *Response:*

The most significant changes to the Federal tax law relating to local taxes are the elimination of the deduction for personal real estate taxes and the increase to the standard deduction. It is unclear precisely how these changes will affect individual Lexington

residents. For some, the higher deduction will have a positive impact, while for others the changes will mean higher taxes. What we do know is that Lexington is funded predominantly by our real estate taxes, and the uncertainty of rising Federal taxes amplifies concerns about local taxes. One of my primary goals as a member of the Board of Selectmen will be to support thoughtful economic development in order to grow our commercial tax base, while keeping a focus on the need to retain the essential character of Lexington and our neighborhoods.

Our tax levy is made up from taxes on both residential and commercial/industrial property. There are different tax rates for residential and commercial properties, with the commercial rate almost twice the residential rate (\$27.69 vs. \$14.30). However, the base of commercial taxpayers has decreased significantly in recent decades, shifting more of the burden onto residential taxpayers. In the 1980s, the residential/commercial split was approximately  $\frac{2}{3}$  residential,  $\frac{1}{3}$  commercial. Today, it is roughly 80% residential/20% commercial. This shift is adding pressure on residential taxpayers. Lexington has the opportunity to explore and implement smart-growth principles, which can create a win-win for our economic and environmental sustainability. By encouraging the development of modern, energy efficient, high tech or life science office and lab spaces with supporting facilities, such as food and retail, in a manner which complements our town character, we create the opportunity for a new base of commercial/industrial tax-payers to bolster our tax base and relieve some of the residential tax-payer burden. I look forward to being part of a team that works to make this happen. Communicating with residents as we progress will be extremely important, and I look forward to hearing your ideas and comments.

## **School Committee**

Question for School Committee candidates: Since the voters approved the debt exclusions for the new Hastings School and the new Lexington Children's Place, what is next on the Master Plan with respect to renovating and / or replacing aging school / administration buildings?

### **Kathleen Lenihan**

Precinct: 4

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#### *Community Activities:*

- Bowman PTA President
- Clarke PTO President
- LHS PTO President
- Town Meeting Member
- Co-Chair, Yes For Lexington 2016 and 2017
- Lexington Youth Coalition Steering Committee

*Response:*

We are fortunate to live in a community so supportive of education, as seen by the willingness of voters to approve much needed projects like the new Hastings and LCP, as well as the expansions at Clarke and Diamond in 2016. We will need more of this support as we continue to replace and/or renovate other school buildings to meet the needs of our growing enrollment.

Lexington has seen incredible enrollment growth in recent years, going from 6182 students in the 2009-10 school year to 7300 students as of Feb. 1 of this year. While it would be wonderful to report that we will not continue to see such enrollment growth, that is not the case. By the 21-22 school year, we are projected be at 7825 students, and these increases at are all levels – elementary, middle, and high school.

The priority need is LHS, which is projected to be at 2500 students by the 21-22 school year, an increase of almost 300 students from the 17-18 school year. That LHS is in need of replacement has long been known, and the School Committee is now actively discussing how to move forward with this. I am in favor of submitting an SOI for a new LHS to the MSBA in 2019. In support of this, we have embarked on a visioning process to determine what kind of high school we want for our future students – both the building itself and what kind of education we want to take place in that building. This is an incredible opportunity for our community to imagine what we want for our high school students both now and for years to come. However, before we move forward with plans for a new LHS, we need to meet the needs of the very large classes set to arrive at LHS starting next year. Some small renovations will be necessary to create adequate science classroom space for these students. We need to plan for both the short and long term.

As we attend to the needs of the high school, we cannot ignore that our elementary and middle schools will experience serious overcrowding, despite the enlarged Hastings, Clarke and Diamond. Asking voters to approve three new schools – a 7<sup>th</sup> elementary school, a 3<sup>rd</sup> middle school and a new LHS - is neither realistic nor fiscally responsible. As we move forward with our planning, we need to look critically at all of our options and make difficult choices. For example, if we can address our capacity needs with grade reconfiguration, we need to consider this.

I look forward to continuing my service on the School Committee as we meet the challenge of planning for the future of Lexington students.

**Deepika Sawhney**

Precinct: 6

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*Community Activities:*

Deepika Sawhney has demonstrated commitment to the Lexington Public School System by volunteering in many roles from a PTO president, site council member, chair of STEM school clubs to LHSPTO webmaster. She has worked in technology companies, and served in philanthropic organizations such as LEF, Hestia Fund and EforAll (Lawrence). She is passionate about education, and believes children can grow into confident and empathetic global citizens, who adapt to change with equanimity and skill.

*Response:*

The Lexington Public School system has made a lot of progress on increasing enrollment and school capacity issues. As a community, we were first alerted to these issues in 2013-2014 (by the large 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> grade cohorts). Capital projects such as middle school renovations, additions of modular classrooms, as well as policy changes such as central registration, have managed the increasing numbers and provided a quality education.

However, the incoming numbers of students continues to grow beyond our best estimates. As of February 2018, LPS is already serving a total of 7300 students, a year before our 2014 planning documents anticipated. According to the October 2017 Capital Expenditures Committee report, the number of elementary right sized classrooms will rise to 151 in 2020. However, we still may not be able to house about 150 students. Our oldest school LHS, built in 1953, will be welcoming those same cohorts mentioned earlier, now as our rising 9<sup>th</sup> graders (623 in 2019; 629 students in 2020). These numbers are significant, as currently the largest class at LHS is 581 students. In addition, the biggest LHS classrooms are about a 100sq. feet less than MSBA guidelines, the science labs are too few, and Gen Ed and SPED class needs not completely met.

The School Committee and administration continue to grapple with the issues of increasing enrollment and aging school infrastructure. They are working with consultants to evaluate additional space mining at our schools, and to update the 2014 Master Plan. The consultants have a broad mandate which does not preclude any options: different grade configurations, use of the Central Administration building etc.

In the near term for LHS: design work for needed security improvements is to start; and creative low-cost solutions for the space issues are being evaluated. These may include reconfiguring existing spaces or schedule changes to make better use of them. All of these efforts are progressing in tandem with the High School envisioning process. The process' outputs will factor into either substantial renovations or reconstruction of the existing high school facilities.

These are some of the imperatives currently in progress at the School Committee and administration levels with respect to the Master Plan.

## **Planning Board**

Question for Planning Board candidates: What are your thoughts about the proposed zoning changes for the commercial area near the intersection of Spring Street and Marrett

Road?

## **Richard Canale**

Precinct: 9

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### *Community Activities:*

- Planning Board: Chair, Liaison to the Comprehensive Planning Advisory Committee, Liaison to several Town Committees including Battle Road Byway Committee, and Bicycle Advisory Committee.
- Town Meeting member for 25+ years. TMMA: Former Precinct officer.
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC): Lexington's Representative, former Executive Board member, Former representative and chair of the Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC).
- Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO): Designee (Alternate) to the MPO.

### *Response:*

While I recognize the need to update and modernize the uses and intensity in this neighborhood and in other neighborhoods, I believe these proposed zoning changes are premature and not yet ready for consideration by the 2018 Annual Town Meeting. The Town has begun a Comprehensive Plan process which will include intensive public participation that is expected to include a vision and strategies for the future use and intensity of neighborhood commercial spaces. I believe the best approach is for the applicant to engage neighbors and the other commercial owners in this local zone to a greater degree, and to work within the Comprehensive Plan process so that any future zoning request is fully vetted and coherent.

Lexington has several small neighborhood commercial districts on small sites in or near residential neighborhoods. This Marrett Road district, between Spring Street and the Res, has small scale retail and service uses. Presently, a variety of uses may locate in the existing buildings. Uses are restricted in size to promote a local orientation and to limit adverse impacts on nearby residential areas. This commercial area is zoned CS and CN. Arguments are being made that the CS and CN districts here are no longer relevant. A new district, which include several new uses, as well as increasing the intensity of uses, is being proposed by one of the owners of five properties (each of the other two properties are owned by different owners).

The present iteration of the proposal only addresses limited, short-term needs with the danger of precluding sustainable long-term zoning that meets both neighbors' and commercial owners' needs. One example is that the proposed zoning precludes residential uses: while we may not wish single family residences here, the idea of small apartments above retail uses to serve older residents is a Town goal that should be seriously considered. Another example is that as plans for signalization for the Spring / Marrett intersection were developed a few years ago, a proposal gained traction for

intersection improvements that could only be accomplished with modest zoning changes: this proposal does not consider this potential change that could improve the overall traffic impact.

The proponent of this Article has stated that he does not wish to wait a year or two for the ongoing Comprehensive Plan to sufficiently articulate the communities vision for these small commercial areas in Town. But, since he states that he has no near-term development plans for his properties, it is not necessary or wise to allow piece-meal short term changes that might not fit into a longer-term plan. Instead, these changes should wait until all of the property owners agree on a vision that has been discussed with the neighborhood. He states his proposed district is intended in part to “better meet the needs of the surrounding neighborhood”. Engaging neighbors only began in late January. It appears clear that there is not sufficient time to understand and incorporate neighbors needs into any rezoning packaging. More engagement is needed.

### **Ginna Johnson**

Precinct: 5

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#### *Community Activities:*

In Lexington I have served on the Senior Center Siting Committee, the Tree Committee, the Design Advisory Committee, and the Busa Land Use Planning Committee. I also served as Associate Planning Board Member and I was appointed to the Planning Board to fill a vacancy during the summer of 2014. I was elected to a 3-year term in March of 2015. I served as chair of the Planning Board’s Residential Policy Committee, which won the support of Town Meeting for zoning changes including restrictions on the gross floor area (GFA) of single family houses.

#### *Response:*

While I think that we should be creative with mixed use and commercial development to both increase sustainability (reduce car trips) and foster community spirit (create gathering places like diners, galleries and shops), I think we also have to be mindful on unintended consequences. For instance, increasing uses to allow banks at this location might prevent the kind of small shops we envision (as happened in the Center). Removing any limits on Floor Area Ratio and reducing setbacks may impact abutters. I would like to treat the sponsor’s short-term requests through the variance process—which would allow abutters to voice their opinions—and then study these proposals as part of the Town-wide analysis of commercial districts we are now undertaking as part of the Comprehensive Plan. I understand that many in Town government want to make commercial zoning less restrictive to encourage development and increase the tax base, however, I think one advantage municipalities have is that we can plan for the long term, not short economic cycles. Let’s not take a band-aid approach to Town planning. Let’s recalibrate our zoning as we protect our quality of life. Let’s encourage smart growth—and let’s take the time to get it right!