



Progressive Newton 2023 Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Deb Crossley

Office Sought: Ward 5 At-Large Councilor

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1. Did you support the three override votes on the ballot this past spring? If not, why?

Yes. I was an early and very active supporter/advocate. Newton simply cannot maintain the levels of service most folks want to enjoy in our community, when a 2.5% limit on property tax remains in effect, and new growth represents about another 1%. Fixed expenses regularly outpace revenues; the city cannot run on air.

2. Following the Override votes, what concrete actions will you take to ensure that NPS students have the greatest opportunities to succeed? Additionally, how do you define “academic excellence”?

As a city councilor, I support the school budget, and continuing to implement the 2013 strategic plan to upgrade school facilities, that will achieve excellence and equity in the condition and capacity of our elementary schools. Councilors have little power to affect curriculum, or how the school budget is prioritized. But to me, “academic excellence” is about the degree to which teachers engage all students to inspire curiosity, exploration and a love of learning across a range of disciplines.

3. On March 29th, the School Committee voted against the creation of a “NPS Academic Principles Advisory Committee.” What is your stance on this vote and the proposed committee?

I wholeheartedly approve of the school committee’s decision. The petition before them was a thinly veiled attempt to destroy our schools long held core values to be inclusive and welcoming to all students, providing equal access and opportunity for all. Our community rose up in defiance, which was beautiful to witness.

4. What does “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” mean to you, and how will you ensure and protect the wellbeing of all students?

DEI is about providing the same opportunity for all people to live and participate in our community, as well as to provide equal opportunity to learn in our schools. Again, City Council has no power to directly affect curriculum, but can support our school policies and programs in our schools that work to achieve these values, and we can defy and disown those who would seek to take them away.

5. What does “Black Lives Matter” mean to you?

Cycles of oppression have plagued human civilization since its beginning, for those who wish to gain power over or profit from others servitude. Maybe some day there will be no prejudice based on a person’s superficial characteristics – and we will truly judge people on the content of their character, not the color of their skin. But black and brown people throughout our history have been subject to unspeakable cruelty. Since our nation’s founding, total subjugation and slavery was rampant, and 20 th century laws to this day prevent certain people from equal access to owning land, attaining housing, accessing education. Although civil rights and fair housing laws have corrected our course, our nation – we - have much to atone.

6. How would you improve access to affordable transportation in Newton?

I continue to support improving public transit in and through Newton. That means lobbying at the state and federal level both for making our Green Line stations and our three commuter rail stations fully accessible and accommodating to all commuters, and increasing ridership. Public transit is always less expensive than private auto travel. I also support the mayor’s

“NewMo” cross town low cost rides – and will support additional subsidies toward keeping fares low. Finally, for those who can, the bike share program is also a low cost local travel option.

7. What concrete steps will you take to combat global climate change, increase renewable energy, and decrease energy consumption in Newton?

I support full implementation of the Newton Climate Action Plan (CAP), and as Zoning & Planning Chair, I am making sure our agenda carries forward all initiatives that can work to achieve the CAP. I work closely with Newton’s Sustainability Team, Citizens’ Energy Commission and Green Newton on the following newer initiatives: - The opt-in “Specialized Energy Code” (adopted, effective 1/1/24), - Secure Newton’s place as one of ten communities who may require electrification of new construction under the Ten Communities Act (draft ordinance approved in ZAP; submitted to DOER for review); - BERDO – Building Energy Reporting & Reduction Disclosure Ordinance is under development, coming to ZAP this fall, which will require existing commercial building owners to implement plan to reduce emissions on existing buildings; - raising the bar on energy efficiency and clean energy on private development projects; and perhaps most importantly, to repair our zoning to allow more compact housing within and around our existing business centers in highly walkable areas that will reduce car trips and energy per capita.

8. What value do you place on increasing affordable housing in Newton, and what concrete steps will you take to expand affordable housing?

Huge value! - I have been working on advancing and enabling more housing, and more housing that is affordable to more people earning a wider range of incomes, for as long as I can remember. It is critical that our zoning laws, which became increasingly exclusionary over the last century, change so as to enable the more modest housing Newton desperately needs if we are to provide for the well-being of our community, support local business, and become a truly welcoming community. As Chair of the Zoning & Planning committee since 2020, I have been working to change the rules to allow more housing. I support the proposed village center overlay district (VCOD), which would allow multifamily housing (3 or more units) “by-right”, within 12 village business districts and the immediately surrounding neighborhoods. By allowing the right mix and amount of housing, retail and other uses, especially when near public transit, using clear rules and design standards versus unending discretionary review, our city centers can become more interesting vibrant places we all can enjoy. We must enable moderate flexible

growth to achieve more complementary and self-sustaining development patterns. In addition, in keeping with the community desire to promote restoration and maintain existing housing stock, the proposed MRT – “Multi Resident Transit” district, incentivizes adaptive reuse to preserve neighborhood scale but allow for more units. I believe this proposal will generate the development we need and want, at comfortable human scale – AND provide the housing we need.

9. What is your definition of public safety? What actions will you take to further this definition in Newton?

Public safety involves everything from properly maintaining our roads, sidewalks, parks, schools, – to making our public ways and places accessible to all users, to quickly and effectively responding to emergencies (fires, floods, storm damage) and to properly address those most difficult situations where folks are in danger of being harmed by others. I will continue to support regular and assertive investment in our shared public places, and support adequate resources for fire and police, including strong training programs and properly connecting social workers, mental health working and other professionals to sensitive situations when needed.

10. What do you believe is the role of local elected leaders in promoting progressive policies at the state and national level?

It is critical to be informed and proactive on all of the ways that state and federal leaders can and should be supporting community needs. I have been in regular communication with members of our state delegation and our congressman on a range of issues, but in particular those issues where legislative action and funding can help Newton meet housing and public transportation needs, and allow us to meet climate related challenges. A few examples follow: Energy and Environment: - I led Newton’s adoption of the 2023 Specialized Energy Code, and in 2009 I led Newton’s becoming the first MA community to adopt the Stretch code; I led adoption of the Newton becoming an MA Green Community, earning DOER grants since 2010; - I led adoption of a strategic plan to rehabilitate our water systems, implemented since 2013, earning over 10 million in MWRA grants; Housing: - I am working through the ZAP committee toward adoption of new village center zoning (see above), which will also be used for Newton’s compliance with the MBTA communities Law, I have engaged with state leaders to improve two aspects of that law – 1/ increasing the depth and amount of affordable housing units that DHCD will allow toward compliance (rules amended in Nov 22), and most

recently, to allow us to require mixed use in our central business districts and count the residential units above (coming soon!)

11. Use this space to add anything you have not mentioned and that you would like us to know about your experience, vision for Newton, etc.

I hope that my record of accomplishment and continued dedication to improving our public places, readying our city to confront climate change, planning for a future that can provide equal opportunity for everyone – will inspire you to come out and vote this November to keep me on the City Council!

YES/NO (Massachusetts state legislature bill numbers follow in parentheses, where applicable)

1. Do you support lowering the municipal voting age to 16?

YES.

2. If the MBTA is unable to expand service, would you be in favor of having the MWRTA (MetroWest Regional Transit Authority) expand service instead?

YES.

3. Do you support the “Real Estate Transfer Fee”? (S.1771/H.2747)

YES.

4. Do you support the “HERO bill”? (S.1799/ H.2894)

YES.

5. Do you support “An Act to Promote Yes in My Backyard”? (S.858/ H.1379)

YES.

6. Do you support raising the minimum wage to \$20? (S.1200/ H.1925)

YES.

**7. Do you support “Preventing Fair Share Amendment Tax Avoidance”?
(S.1866/H.2909)**

YES.

[Read about the aforementioned bills here](#)