

Questions for Progressive Newton

Multi-Family Housing:

The newly enacted Section 3A of Massachusetts General Law c. 40A states “An MBTA community shall have a zoning ordinance or by-law that provides for at least 1 district of reasonable size in which multi-family housing is permitted as of right; provided, however, that such multi-family housing shall be without age restrictions and shall be suitable for families with children. For the purposes of this section, a district of reasonable size shall: (i) have a minimum gross density of 15 units per acre, subject to any further limitations imposed by section 40 of chapter 131 and title 5 of the state environmental code established pursuant to section 13 of chapter 21A; and (ii) be located not more than 0.5 miles from a commuter rail station, subway station, ferry terminal or bus station, if applicable.”

Do you think that the City of Newton should meet these minimum requirements in the establishment of more multi-family housing near transit stops or exceed them?

Explain your position: **We (the City of Newton) believe we have met the requirements. If we were to “exceed” the requirements it would only be theoretical anyway because of the regulatory formula used for determining minimum compliance. Going further would allow us to make certain properties in our transit-adjacent areas more feasible or viable for redevelopment as a mixed-use commercial and multi-family housing projects in reality, not just on paper. Some of the new zoning probably did not go to enough of a tipping point to see actual changes become economically attractive, but it remains to be seen in the coming years. I would certainly be happy to see more multi-family housing built around our transit stops, and we might need to make further changes to the zoning to see that happen in reality. This would not be about the density formula in the law but about the unit calculations in the regulations.**

Education:

The Newton Teacher’s Association went on strike for eleven days beginning on January 19th and ending February 2nd, 2024. They demanded higher wages, longer parental leave, and social workers in every school among other things. In doing so, they were fined over \$600,000 since in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts it is illegal for public employees to go on strike.

If you were an elected official during the strike, how did you respond to it and why? (if applicable) **I supported the NTA on their strike because as a four year member of the Finance Committee, I believed that the Mayor’s Administration was not correctly representing the city’s financial situation for bargaining purposes and that the reasonable demands of the NTA members were going completely**

unheard. I wish it had not come to a strike, but it seems to have been the only way to resolve the impasse of the year leading up to it.

For candidates who were not in an elected position during the strike: how would you respond to the strike, if it had happened while you were an elected official?

What do you think could have been done to avert the strike? What policies do you support, on the municipal and state level, to ensure that public educators are supported? **The easiest way to have averted the strike would have been for the city and school officials to listen more to the educators about their concerns over several years post-pandemic regarding workplace conditions and student safety with regard to facility quality and staffing levels. The state also needs to make financial changes to better support local governments not only with increased state aid for education and school buildings, but also potentially reviewing the system of local property tax funding and adjusting some of the pension pre-funding expectations. (We need to meet our pension obligations, but there are legitimate disagreements on timetables and methodologies for this, which risk undermining other present-day funding needs.)**

Do you think that teachers in the Commonwealth should be allowed to go on strike and that the law penalizing them from doing should be repealed? **Yes, with a better system for resolving or arbitrating disputes before it escalates to that point.**

Budget of the City of Newton

The mayor of the City of Newton, Ruthanne Fuller, stated that the reason the City was not able to meet the teacher's demands was that the most recent override proposition of \$9,175,000 that was brought to the voters of Newton on March 14, 2023 failed to pass.

Were you a supporter of the override proposal? If so or if not, why? **I was, because I believed it would have helped set aside additional annual resources for schools and other departments.**

How do you think that Newton can meet its budget shortfalls? **Even without an override, some experts on pensions have said that our annually growing schedule for pension pre-funding is too far ahead of where it needs to be to safely meet all our obligations and that this is eating away rapidly at every other present-day budgetary priority. Reorganizing this would make a huge difference financially to the city without risking any of our obligations. Additionally, there are other areas of the budget where I believe we could make reforms to save smaller amounts of money, such as by in-sourcing and consolidating certain functions (e.g. school bus transportation provision, excessive plowing during winter storms).**

Transportation

1. Newton is currently served by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) as well as the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA). Are the current levels of service by these agencies adequate? Why or why not? **We need much better levels of service, from a more reliable Green Line to more frequent bus and commuter rail service. People need to be able to get on these services easily and conveniently, and they need to know they can count on them to work every time. Otherwise people will just choose to drive by default.**
2. Are there any improvements you support for the MBTA and the MWRTA? If so, what would they be? **I have supported and will continue to support the station upgrade projects on the Green Line and Commuter Rail line in Newton, which are all essential to running higher capacity and more frequent service. I also opposed the “reforms” to the MBTA bus system that would mostly just cut service back in Newton and Brookline.**