

**TOWN OF BARNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL ELECTION 2023****BarnstableWatch CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Thank you for stepping forward to serve the Barnstable community by seeking a seat on our Town Council in the fall 2023 election.

*About BarnstableWatch*

BarnstableWatch is a community organization initially founded to protect our housing stock for use as homes for locals rather than use by non-resident investors as more profitable short-term rentals. BarnstableWatch supports Cape rental traditions, not the 'Anything goes-Anywhere-All the time Airbnb approach.' Since its foundation, BarnstableWatch followers have asked for information about planning and zoning more broadly. BarnstableWatch therefore follows local public bodies and shares information.

*About This Questionnaire*

BarnstableWatch provides this opportunity to each candidate running for a Town Council seat in the fall 2023 election to provide 250-word responses to four planning and zoning-related questions below. The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide information that residents interested in planning and zoning may assess for themselves.

Please use this word document to respond to each of the four questions on the following pages. Please include your name and precinct number on each page. Please respond in 250 words or less, and via typewritten text (not handwritten). Please send your responses by 5:00 p.m. on Friday October 6, 2023 to [BarnstableWatch@gmail.com](mailto:BarnstableWatch@gmail.com).

BarnstableWatch will print all responses (up to 250 words), unedited, and without commentary, or endorsement, at [www.BarnstableWatch.com](http://www.BarnstableWatch.com). If you choose not to respond, BarnstableWatch will simply note that fact on its website.

BarnstableWatch will send all responses (up to 250 words) to its email list of many hundreds of residents across the Town of Barnstable. BarnstableWatch will not characterize responses or encourage its followers to vote for or against any candidate. If you choose not to respond, BarnstableWatch will simply note that fact in its mailing.

Thank you for responding to help voters make informed decisions.

CANDIDATE NAME           JOHN CROW          PRECINCT NUMBER           5          **Question No. 1***Thank you for being direct and concise in 250 words per question.*

1. *Context:* The Town Council recently changed zoning in Downtown Hyannis to enable dense building development and increased building height by right.<sup>1</sup> It did this in the name of housing.<sup>2</sup> Despite housing needs, and the Town’s consultant statement<sup>3</sup> that the Town could regulate short-term rental use of new housing units in this zoning framework, the Town Council chose not to do so.

*Question:* To increase year-round housing supply for locals, do you support regulating incremental housing units, made possible by zoning changes to increase building density and height, to be used as year-round housing, i.e., restrict use as short-term rentals? Why or why not?

*Answer:*

**Thank you for an opportunity to comment. I reply to each question but emphasize that as a Councilor, before I vote, I will create meaningful opportunity to gather public views, I will listen to the people, and I will respond to the people. I am running because I believe we need more transparency, more listening, and more responsive representation. I offer views subject to that critically important objective.**

I share the experience of being a young working person living in a high-cost area and having to find my way to home ownership over time. I often worked two jobs, and long hours. It’s not easy.

If the people express interest in dense development and increased building height in a robust public process, I believe it should be done in a way that is sustainable by way of our natural and other resources, and that the rules around such development meet *locals’ needs first*. Given locals’ and workers’ need for housing, it’s not responsive to community needs to let new homes that result from density be Airbnb’d by non-resident investors. There are many ways to execute that end for locals and workers while preserving our important Cape family rental traditions, and without compromising our tourist-based economy. I also believe any development must be done mindful of preserving the character of our surroundings that is so central in drawing tourists here in continued support of our local businesses and economy.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.townofbarnstable.us/departments/planninganddevelopment/Projects/Downtown-Hyannis-Zoning-Revision.asp>

<sup>2</sup> “The focus of the rezoning was to create a predictable regulatory framework that would encourage compact residential development, compatible with traditional development patterns, meeting a range of housing needs.”

<https://www.townofbarnstable.us/departments/planninganddevelopment/Projects/Downtown-Hyannis-Zoning-Revision.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Town Consultant at Hyannis Zoning Workshop, March 2020: “I mean Airbnb can be regulated of course...”

CANDIDATE NAME                     JOHN CROW                    PRECINCT NUMBER                     5                    **Question No. 2***Thank you for being direct and concise in 250 words per question.*

2. *Context:* When the Town of Barnstable asked people what kind of housing they want more of, the number one answer people gave was more single-family homes.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, a housing advocacy organization states that “[s]ingle-family zoning is the ‘heart of the housing crisis’ in its call for zoning changes.<sup>5</sup> The Town Planning Director calls single-family zoning a “burden” on the community, and said the Accessory Dwelling Unit zoning change was a “babystep” to “pushing back” on the “legacy” of single-family residential zoning.<sup>6</sup>

*Question:* Do you support keeping single-family zoning in those areas of town now zoned for single-family use? Why or why not?

*Answer:* I support asking the people what they want, listening to them, and responding to them. It’s why I am running – responsive representation. In reply to a survey, people across Barnstable said first and foremost that they want more single-family residential homes.

I support maintaining single-family zoning where it exists today and meeting diverse housing needs. We don’t need to choose between the two. There are many ways to address diverse housing needs, including redeveloping properties, without taking the extreme act of upending the single-family homes and zoning that Barnstable residents have said they value and want. I also support Accessory Dwelling Units as a way to increase affordable housing stock, provided the owner lives in the primary or accessory unit and the other unit has a year-round rental requirement. That’s the point of ADUs – an accessory use to one’s home that provides smaller, more affordable, year-round housing. This is consistent with our relatively new ADU rule, and the ADU rules across nearly all of Cape Cod.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://itlaserfiche.town.barnstable.ma.us/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=920267&dbid=0&repo=TownOfBarnstable> Local Comprehensive Plan survey at page 5.

<sup>5</sup> <https://haconcapcod.org/blog/hacbeat-march-april-2023/> at page 3.

<sup>6</sup>Town Council Zoning Subcommittee meeting, June 2020. The Town has taken down the Zoning and Regulatory Subcommittee agendas, minutes, and videos from its website. They are available via a record request. BarnstableWatch volunteers’ meeting transcripts show this passage at minute 56:12 from a recording of the municipal television broadcast.

CANDIDATE NAME                     JOHN CROW                    PRECINCT NUMBER                     5                    **Question No. 3**

*Thank you for being direct and concise in 250 words per question.*

3. *Context:* Across the country, cities and towns - including thriving tourist communities - protect existing housing stock for use as homes by locals. They adopt any one of a number of diverse ways towns can prevent or limit non-resident investors from using homes as more profitable short-term rentals.<sup>7</sup> There are lots of ways for towns to limit or end the heartbreaking stories we hear each spring about locals getting kicked out of their rentals to make way for more lucrative short-term renters. Town Housing staff said this about incenting seasonal homeowners to rent year-round rather than short-term: “We have a large housing stock. It’s just not being used to house our residents.”<sup>8</sup> The Town Council has taken no action in this respect to prioritize locals in the use of our housing stock.

*Question:* Do you support adopting some means to return some homes used as short-term rentals to year-round housing use for locals (*other than by one means a local developer has sought, which is for the town to pay property owners via tax incentives not to short-term rent their property*)? Why or why not?

*Answer:* Barnstable should return some of our housing stock to use by locals as homes. It’s time to prioritize locals and workers in our housing decisions.

There are many options through which the Town can both preserve long-standing Cape family rental traditions *and* preserve our housing stock for use as homes by local residents and workers. Municipalities nationally, including those with major tourist-dependent economies, have dealt effectively with the Airbnb dynamic, its impact on housing availability and the well-studied upward pressure it puts on housing prices. Our young families should not have to compete for housing as they do today with non-resident investors intending to short-term rent our housing stock.

I am confident that we can meet the challenge collaboratively. I know we can better meet residents’ and workers’ housing needs while continuing our long-standing Cape family rental traditions that help locals welcome guests and make ends meet.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://barnstablewatch.com>

<sup>8</sup> Housing Committee [minutes](#) May 21, 2019

CANDIDATE NAME                     JOHN CROW                    PRECINCT NUMBER                                     5                                    **Question No. 4**

Thank you for being direct and concise in 250 words per question.

4. *Context:* The Town of Barnstable regularly says it needs more affordable housing units. In the recent form-based zoning changes in downtown Hyannis (about which its consultant said “...any near-term development is going to be on the upper end of market rate...that means they are going to be expensive units”<sup>9</sup>) the Town Council did not include any affordability requirement(s). In the Accessory Dwelling Unit-by right ordinance change, the Town Council did not include any affordability requirement(s).<sup>10</sup> When developers wanted a more profitable use of land at 850 Falmouth Road in Hyannis than the zoning code required, the Town Council said yes: The Residences at 850 in Hyannis is today advertised as a *Luxury Apartment Community*. It sits on land that had been zoned to be 100% affordable housing, with a preference for Barnstable residents and Veterans.

*Question:* Please comment on whether you would leave pricing to developers and property owners, or incorporate affordability into approvals?

*Answer:* I watch board, committee and Council meetings closely. I see them reacting to, and prioritizing, what developers want. I believe we need to be more proactive, and more deliberate, in meeting *residents’* needs. I support linking project approvals, and requests for public funds, to affordability requirements. I also support monitoring for accountability over time.

In August, I listened to a town board discuss a request from a developer who is also a public official for a half a million dollars to support just two affordable housing units. That same board talked about how the town has handed out public money to developers to support affordable units in the past without a mechanism to track the rents the developers end up charging tenants over time.

We need to steward public funds to have real accountability, and we need to serve *residents’* affordability needs over time.

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<sup>9</sup> Hyannis Zoning Workshop March 2020.

<sup>10</sup> The Planning Department staff said the Town’s Accessory *Affordable* Apartment program was expected to stay on the books, but to have attrition into the new *market rate* ADU program. Source: Zoning and Regulatory Subcommittee December 16, 2020.