

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.

BarnstableWatch will print all responses (up to 250 words), unedited, and without commentary, or endorsement, at 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 Paul Cusack _____

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.¹ It did this in the name of housing.² Despite housing needs, and the Town's consultant statement³ 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:

I like above where Barnstable Watch states its support of Cape rental traditions. Regulating private property, like real estate, happens in any number of positive ways, but I am hesitant to want to over-regulate a space like this until I was comfortable with a clear and updated enumeration of the delta between year-round primary residences and those lost to a STR designation. My reluctance, in part, stems from the potential second and third order consequences for the many families in our town who manage their mortgage and tax obligations, in a material way, through informal arrangements. I don't advise any sort of illegality in this regard, but this is more than just some quaint cultural remnant. These arrangements make ends meet for many. That being said, the Town has been more faithfully tracking these trends now for a little bit, and we should dig into that data for more insights about future regulations.

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

² "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>

³ Town Consultant at Hyannis Zoning Workshop, March 2020: "I mean Airbnb can be regulated of course..."

CANDIDATE NAME Paul Cusack _____

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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶

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 don't want to betray a lack of confidence in the work of the LCP, but I feel like I hear a slightly different tune when I am out knocking doors. I'm meeting lots of folks living with extended parts of their own family and looking to get into their own place around here. And they are all having zero luck. I support in every conceivable way the notion of homeownership. It's a critical part of our national fabric – the pride, the challenge. However, as we realized back around 2008/09, not absolutely everyone should own a home. We might find some easing of the overall housing situation if we diversified our stock in select places. Afterall, every town in America started with an inner core of mixed use residential and commercial. It's a big part of the American Town DNA, as it were. We should be unafraid then to try and tap into that. Precinct 5 is a consequential source of property tax revenue for our Town. We should be proud of that fact but also humbly recognize how fortunate we are for the beautiful bubble this place can be. Many of our neighbors, our fellow citizens, don't have it so good. The reasons for this are myriad but the takeaway is simple, our good fortune is no burden and, in part, the legacy of single-family housing is a town budget bolstered by unique housing values.

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

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

⁶ 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 Paul Cusack_____

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.⁷ 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.”⁸ 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:

I’m not interested in living in an investor-owned neighborhood. I don’t like the idea of businesses operating as quasi-innkeepers in our neighborhoods. If you purchased a home in a neighborhood that is zoned for single-family occupancy, I believe you can have a fair expectation as to the use of the rest of the homes on the street. But, again, that cycles back to the potential for unintended consequences to our seasonally dependent economy. If we can’t attract a workforce to our region to staff the thousands of open jobs around here, then we will continue to operate considerably below our economic potential. So that’s more of a housing issue masquerading as a labor disconnect. It’s not. It’s just the cost of housing here.

⁷ <https://barnstablewatch.com>

⁸ Housing Committee [minutes](#) May 21, 2019

CANDIDATE NAME Paul Cusack _____

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”⁹) 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).¹⁰ 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 don't want to offend anyone over at those luxury residences that you mention, but maybe the term 'luxury' is more of a marketing device, but I don't know. What I do know is that I want to live in a neighborhood in which a good cross-section of those who work and serve here can actually live and raise a family in our community, too. Folks at the post office and teaching in our classrooms, fighting our fires, nursing us, and cutting our collective hedges, those folks. So if your question is getting to root of that, then yes. Thanks.

⁹ Hyannis Zoning Workshop March 2020.

¹⁰ 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.