

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 **CHARLIE BLOOM**

PRECINCT NUMBER **PRECINCT 9**

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 will be expressing my personal views when answering all four of these questions. However, the will of the people of Precinct 9 will always be my primary guiding light. That said, I am personally not in favor of zoning changes that increase building density and height above three stories in downtown Hyannis because we need to protect and preserve our village-like character. With that proviso in mind, we definitely need to look at any possible solution to increase the year-round housing supply for our local citizens. That includes a serious reexamination of the Town Consultant’s acknowledgment that we could regulate short-term housing. One wonders why the Town Council chose not to do that. It’s a decision that does not take an objective look at what is good for the residents of Hyannis because it simultaneously gives the green light to developers who claim that they are here to solve our housing problems with massive structures where children will have a parking lot to play in. We need more open space for our families. We need adequate parking. We cannot address the housing issue in a way that does harm to the character and ambiance of a seaside village because that is our bread and butter as a tourist destination.

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 **CHARLIE BLOOM**

PRECINCT NUMBER **PRECINCT 9**

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 am personally for keeping single-family zoning for the time being. We should be doing everything possible to realize the dreams of folks who want a single-family home. If these homes are equipped with an Accessory Dwelling Unit, all the better for everyone involved. However, we should be closely and carefully assessing proposed zoning changes that diminish the character and quality of life for the citizens who already live in Hyannis. It is arguably the aftermath of previous urbanizing zoning changes that has caused deep concern for Hyannis residents when they see proposed housing on Main Street that is not in keeping with the historicity of a seaside village. That’s why people visit us: we are a quaint seaside village. If the Town Planning Director described single-family zoning as a “burden” throughout the entire town of Barnstable, then we should give a serious look to it’s implications. However, many citizens of Hyannis would have strong objections to any pursuit of zoning changes if the Town Planner was referring to single-family housing only in Hyannis.

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.

⁶Town 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 CHARLIE BLOOM

PRECINCT NUMBER PRECINCT 9

Question No. 3

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

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 personally support adopting some means of returning homes to year-round housing. But we should also be looking at rundown or vacant buildings as a possible source of housing units. It seems to me that this is precisely what HAC could be doing for our citizens in need of housing. Our housing crisis can not be resolved by turning Hyannis into a haven for Airbnb. We need to address this particular aspect of the housing crisis before available homes are gobbled up by profiteers who hoodwink us into thinking that they know what we need. We should be telling developers what we need, but we don't seem to have a plan or any idea of what we want. Do we take ownership in the direction of our village and town, or do we sit back and wait for developers and their high power lawyers to tell us what we need? Nor do we seem to understand the impact our zoning laws have on the historicity of Hyannis. Our town meetings in this regard are mostly decided by individual committee/commission members indicating that they like what they see or they don't like it. That is not a plan. That is a subjective opinion. And it's anguishing for people who live in Hyannis to hear opinions like this from people who do not live in Hyannis. If we had a plan of action, we could avoid many of these contentious committee/commission meetings while providing our residents with the housing they need.

⁷ <https://barnstablewatch.com>

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

CANDIDATE NAME CHARLIE BLOOM

PRECINCT NUMBER PRECINCT 9

Question No. 4

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

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 personally think that affordability should be incorporated into approvals. Of course there will be people who will say that developers won't do business here if affordability is part of the process. I'd say these people have no faith in capitalism. Of course there will be developers who will make proposals. And maybe those proposals will include fewer expensive units and more units that are truly affordable.

These four questions suggest that the Town Council has shown a need for increased responsiveness to the working class folks who live in Barnstable or who want to live here. Their actions have favored the visions of developers and people who can afford to pay for expensive condos, apartments, and homes. And in doing so, it has caused anguish and animosity between governance and citizenry. Leadership needs to build bridges among Councilors and between the Council and the community. The Council is now (and will be) comprised of intelligent and well-meaning people who have the ability to build these bridges. We need to do so while honoring the mandate of Planning and Development to work “with community partners and other Town departments, to promote comprehensive, sustainable land use and economic development strategies ***to preserve the character of the Barnstable's seven villages and improve residents' quality of life.***”

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.

