



[Lex-Wiki.Org](http://Lex-Wiki.Org) is a local Wikipedia for Lexington, MA. [Lex-wiki.Org](http://Lex-wiki.Org) covers Arts and Entertainment, Local Flora and Fauna, Local History, City Life as well as Town Government and other issues of public interest in Lexington.

**Name:** Michelle Ciccolo

**Web Site Address:** [www.michelleciccolo.com](http://www.michelleciccolo.com)

**Phone:** 781-330-0370

**Email:** [mciccololex@gmail.com](mailto:mciccololex@gmail.com)

**Submission Date:** 2/19/17

## Biographical Question

1. *What can you tell us about yourself? Please include a brief outline of your relevant experience, whether from private or public life – including public offices held, and volunteer work.*

I am a lifelong Lexington resident and product of the Lexington Public Schools, Class of 1985. I'm married and I have two children, one a recent LHS Graduate now in college and an LHS Sophomore. I have been professionally engaged in the municipal arena since obtaining my Master's Degree in Public Affairs. I was the Assistant Town Administrator and Community Development Director for the Town of Hudson for 20 years and now I run my own municipal and community development consulting firm (The Ciccolo Group). My volunteer roles in Lexington began when I was in my 20's and served on Town Meeting for Precinct 4. Later when my husband and I bought a house, I also served on Town Meeting representing Precinct 9. In 2011 I was elected to serve a term on the Planning Board and during that term I chaired the Estabrook School Access Ad Hoc Task Force and Chaired the Community Center Design Advisory Committee until that facility opened and transitioned to a permanent committee. In 2014 I was elected to the Board of Selectmen for a 3 year term. I have been a parent volunteer and an adult leader with Boy Scout Troop 160. Additional Lexington roles and statewide and regional boards include:

- Vice President of the Mass. Selectmen's Association.
- Mass. Municipal Association Board Member and Local Government Advisory Commission
- Legislative Committee Chair of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and past President for 3 terms.
- MassPort Community Advisory Committee representing Lexington
- Cary Library Board of Trustees
- Mass. Bike and Pedestrian Advisory Board (MABPAB)

## Candidate Platform

---

### *2. Why are you running for Selectman?*

I am seeking another term on the Board of Selectmen because I love my home town and my fellow Lexingtonians, and am passionate about delivering strong local government. I also believe my background makes me uniquely positioned to be able to serve the town well. Lexington faces many complex challenging issues including the need to provide adequate capital facilities for public safety and our schools. During this critical time in our community's history, it is essential that our leaders have the experience, knowledge, and wisdom to guide us through the myriad of decisions we will need to make in order to stay on course.

I am running to continue the important work at hand and to ensure that Lexington remains a vibrant, inclusive, welcoming community that is a desirable place where people and businesses can prosper.

## Policy Questions

---

### *3. What are the largest challenges Lexington faces over the next few years?*

While it is certain that our pressing capital infrastructure need is the largest fiscal challenge facing our town, I would add to that concern the fact that increasingly, in recent years, getting to consensus has become more difficult to achieve. We are experiencing a new level of acrimony in the tone and tenor of our public dialog.

The demographics of our community are changing. At the same time that we are welcoming new families from all over the world with young children, we simultaneously have an increasing percentage of seniors in our population. This is exciting but presents its own set of challenges. We want to keep our seniors in town as they are such an important part of our community, but it is harder and harder for seniors to stay here when property taxes continue to stretch their finances. Our young families were attracted to Lexington because of the quality of our municipal services. They have an expectation that we will continue to deliver high caliber schools and good services. In a world that does not have limitless financial resources, it is harder and harder to serve all constituencies, and debates over how to allocate resources are a natural result of this tension. Conflicting needs can create a mire in which municipalities fail at making important decisions in a timely manner. This makes it critical for us to rebuild our community vision; to engage in dialog and conversation with our neighbors in order to come to a common set of values and objectives to guide us forward in the future.

4. *Should Lexington promote more affordable housing through its zoning policies?*

Yes, Lexington should seek ways to promote more affordable housing through its zoning policies for several reasons. First, it's the right thing to do and Lexington needs more moderately and affordably priced homes of varying sizes and configurations to provide options for our residents. Moreover, we must stay at the 40B state mandated minimum percentage of 10% (Lexington is presently at 11.1%) in order to avoid the consequences of what happens if we fall below 10%. Developers are not required to comply with local zoning laws in communities below this 10% mandate, so a failure to keep up would mean we risk having adverse dense development pushed on us by developers which would be outside our control. This means as we incrementally add market-rate housing units in town, we must be mindful to continue to create 10% of these as affordable units so we don't become non-compliant.

However, we also need to add new units in creative ways that respect smart-growth principals, endeavoring to grow slowly and incrementally in areas with adequate infrastructure that are best able to handle growth. Modest increases near our existing transit routes makes sense as does nominal infill development that does not overwhelm neighborhoods. Finally, in our zoning tools, if we grant any developer density incentives, they must be coupled with mandatory inclusionary zoning. This means that when a developer is granted a higher density than current zoning would allow by rights, a minimum of 10% of the units should be affordable units.

5. *How can our town responsibly finance the construction cost of all the new school space it needs, and of the proposed new fire and police stations?*

Fortunately, Lexington has been setting aside funds into a Capital Stabilization account with the knowledge that several large projects are coming. This fund will significantly help the town soften the impact of the new bonds we must issue, particularly in the early years of those financing debt schedules when the payments and tax burden are the highest. Nonetheless, in view of the very necessary capital projects we have on the horizon, the Town will need to look for ways to tighten its spending in other areas to provide as much room as possible within the budget for tax-levy debt support. Still, we will likely need to send several projects out to the community for consideration of debt exclusion funding, including the new Hastings, and Fire Station projects. This is the only way to responsibly fund these large projects in a fashion that will not overwhelm our operating budget so that we can continue to deliver regular, high quality school and municipal services.

6. *Should Lexington create opportunities to expand commercial development within commercial zones to reduce the residential tax burden? If yes, how can that be achieved?*

Yes, we need to continue to create opportunities for commercial development within our commercial zones because a balanced mix of residential and commercial tax base is essential in supporting our budget. In recent years, the proportion of our tax base that is commercial has been

declining as new residential growth and residential property values outpace commercial growth. This puts an even greater burden on residential taxpayers.

The overlay incentive zoning created for the Hartwell Avenue corridor, known as the Transportation Management Overlay District, could serve as a model for other zones in town and we may want to explore something similar for the Hayden Ave. vicinity. This tool enabled the Town to consider and project the impact of incremental growth on transportation services and calculated a contribution required of developers to set a known mitigation fee. The tool provides developers with a fair and predictable mitigation fee and a smoother path to permitting which helps to incentivize its use. It also provides the Town with some of the payments it will need to make the ongoing investments in infrastructure upgrades. Given the pressures on our existing road network, if we are going to have any new commercial growth, the impact of any newly proposed development on our transportation system needs careful, diligent, and strategic consideration before we proceed.

*7. The Community Preservation Act (CPA) tax surcharge is used to fund affordable housing, recreation facilities, open space conservation, and preservation of historic structures. What is your opinion of how CPA functions in Lexington?*

The CPA fund has brought us many wonderful and important projects including the Cary Hall renovation, the new Community Center, affordable housing units, Cotton Farm, Wright Farm, Busa Farm, recreation facility upgrades, and so much more. Lexington's 3% CPA property tax surcharge, and the state matching funds that come from the program, have been a valuable addition to our coffers and this has expanded the reach of our municipal dollars. However, it's important to remember that CPA funds are restrictive and can only be spent on the 3 eligible categories: open space/recreation, affordable housing creation/preservation, and historic preservation. Many types of ordinary maintenance are ineligible for CPA funds.

When Lexington started in the CPA program, we received a 100% state match. In recent years, the match has been only in the 20% range and it is projected to fall to a rate of between 11-13% this upcoming year now that numerous large cities, including Boston, have joined. I'm working with a number of coalitions advocating at the state level to recapitalize the CPA and there is hope these groups will be able to get the state's matching rate back up to 50%.

If this effort is successful, there may be some value in determining the amount of constant dollars Lexington would like to generate for CPA purposes. In future years, if the match goes back up to 50%, we might be able to collect the same amount of revenue we are collecting today (or more), with a lower than 3% property tax surcharge. Moreover, recent changes to the statute allow communities with a minimum of a 1% tax surcharge to dedicate other municipal revenues to the CPA and still receive the state match. Since Lexington has borrowed against future CPA funds for some of its larger CPA projects, we will need to remain in the CPA program for some years to come and I would never advocate leaving the CPA because of all the important quality of life projects the CPA has facilitated. However, as we are confronted with urgent capital needs in other areas of our community, we may have to explore if 3% is the correct surcharge percentage going forward. Since

we would always still have the option of adding other non-property tax revenue to our fund to maximize the state match, we could make annual decisions on how much to allocate to CPA and have more flexibility if we explored lowering our percentage. This issue will need a broad community dialogue, and a ballot vote, and I do not yet have a firm opinion as to whether or not I would vote to support any change. I am merely flagging it for my fellow citizens to consider.

Finally, we also need to be mindful of how many projects our staff and community can realistically advance at one time. CPA projects, because they are new initiatives, tend to be management intensive or they can falter with a lack of a champion. The addition of the relatively new staff position - Assistant Town Manager for Development - filled by Carol Kowalski - has been helping Lexington address its backlog of CPA project advancement.

*8. What changes, if any, would you like to see in property taxation in Lexington?*

As one of your Selectmen, I have been hearing more frequently in recent years from residents who feel that the burden of property taxes has become too onerous. Indeed, the debt exclusions we have had to pursue in order to make necessary large capital investments have increasingly squeezed our taxpayers.

Faced with even more debt-exclusion override votes on the horizon, it may be time to consider using the residential tax exemption or developing Lexington-specific tools through home-rule legislation, to help shift the burden off more moderately priced homes which tend to be occupied by our less wealthy neighbors, and/or those on fixed incomes. However, tax shifting techniques can often come with a host of unintended consequences. Selectmen have an advisory committee on tax exemptions and deferrals. Before we consider pursuing any new tools, we will want to conduct extensive analysis and hold a very careful debate about the merits of different approaches.

*9. What should Lexington do to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety?*

Lexington should continue to advance the implementation of its new Complete Streets policy by funding bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure needs to address safety, by updating various local regulations to be more in-line with the principles of Complete Streets, and by supporting our committees and staff in addressing bicycle and pedestrian safety.

Those who know me well understand that I have been an outspoken, passionate advocate for Complete Streets both locally and at the State level. Complete Streets are roads that are designed and maintained to be safe and comfortable for all transportation users of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets take into account the needs of all types of users of our roadway systems from bicycles to pedestrians to children to seniors and those with disabilities, and includes cars, commercial users whose vehicles might be larger, buses, transit, etc. Complete Streets do not mandate a one-size-fits-all approach but rather emphasize context sensitivity where each individual

roadway, when up for maintenance or reconstruction, should be reviewed to take into account how to accommodate the different road user types.

Massachusetts has a new Complete Streets Incentive program which was created in statute and is offered through MassDOT as a way to help communities achieve these objectives. Several years ago, when I was the President of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, I conceived of this program and then helped to get the legislation written and advocated statewide for its passage. During the development of the program, I worked alongside the advocacy community to give MassDOT input so that it could develop a program that would be both appealing and practical to communities. Once the program was rolled out, I spoke up frequently to encourage Lexington to pass a policy so that we would be eligible for these funds. The Lexington Board of Selectmen did pass a Complete Streets policy so we are now eligible to apply for funding annually.

*10. What is your view of the Center Streetscape design recommendations made by the Design Review Ad-Hoc Committee – including the proposed choice of materials for sidewalks?*

I am in favor of ADA compliant, wire cut bricks which preserve our traditional heritage and respect the recommendations of the Selectmen-appointed Ad Hoc Committee. Nonetheless, we have a civic and moral responsibility to remove the physical barriers present in our center today that prevent people with disabilities from being able to access and navigate freely. There are many areas in the Center that are impassible today for those in wheelchairs. There are also many public safety hazards throughout the center and the road surface needs attention. For these reasons, we must move this project forward diligently to prevent further deteriorate of the roadbed and sidewalks, which will make future reconstruction even more expensive. Doing nothing is not an option.

Any material we choose is only as good as the maintenance and upkeep we direct to it, so before we build anything, we must also commit to ongoing, fully-funded maintenance of the project. For those looking for a longer explanation of my position on this issue, please visit my website: [www.michelleciccolo.com](http://www.michelleciccolo.com).

---

*All candidates are asked to limit the response to each question to at most two or three paragraphs, and to provide the questionnaire responses by end of day Sunday, Feb 19th, 2017. Responses will not be edited, and will run as submitted. They will be posted on [lex-wiki.org](http://lex-wiki.org) in PDF format and announced through other town media. Questionnaire coordinator Andrei Radulescu-Banu ([bitdribble@gmail.com](mailto:bitdribble@gmail.com), 617-216-8509).*

---