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Biographical Question

1. *What can you tell us about yourself? Please include a brief outline of your relevant experience, including public offices held and volunteer service.*

I earned my undergraduate degree from Smith College and a Master of Landscape Architecture degree from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. My family moved from Philly to Lexington in 1996. After practicing at firms in Boston and Cambridge, I opened my own firm in 2005, Esker Company Landscape Architecture LLC.

In Lexington I have served on the Senior Center Siting Committee, the Tree Committee, the Design Advisory Committee, and the Busa Land Use Planning Committee. I also served as Associate Planning Board Member and I was appointed to the Planning Board to fill a vacancy during the summer of 2014.

My professional practice as a landscape architect enables me to understand the site plans and buildings proposed by applicants as well as make recommendations to improve those plans, including best management practices for layout and grading, stormwater management and planting.

Candidate Platform

2. Why are you running for Planning Board?

I feel the density of development in Lexington over the past few years has had an impact on the character of the Town and our quality of life. As several questions below indicate, the adverse impacts of development are complex and interrelated, including loss of privacy, light spill, traffic congestion, noise pollution, loss of tree canopy, stormwater management problems that range from wet basements to soil erosion, loss of affordable housing, loss of income diversity, and loss of historic or neighborhood character.

I would like to hear residents' opinions about the adverse impacts of development in Lexington during an open, inclusive public forum sponsored by the Planning Board. I want to know if a majority of Lexingtonians think development should be limited, and if so, what zoning regulations we should use to ensure smart development. Many of my answers below repeat the call for such a public conversation.

3. What do you believe are the planning priorities for Lexington in the short-term and long-term?

Addressing the adverse impacts of development are the planning priorities for Lexington in the short and long-term. Again, given the increased density of development, I would like the Town to come together to discuss how we can best balance private property rights and the shared community resources that give the property its value.

Policy Questions

4. What should the Planning Board do to ensure affordability of housing in the low and medium income brackets in Lexington?

As a Town Meeting member, I support funding a robust LexHAB program to purchase and renovate existing homes. In this way, we can maintain a diversity of housing stock, preserve mature existing trees and maintain neighborhood character. Moreover, I think the Town should investigate other programs such as reverse mortgages to keep senior citizens in their homes as long as they are able to live independently as well as preserve existing smaller homes.

I think the Planning Board has made every effort to encourage diversity of housing stock, but the word on the street is that the permitting process required for Balanced Housing and Site Sensitive developments is too onerous, and that the Planning Board will start to see more conventional, by-right development of single family homes on parcels that are assembled and then reconfigured to create more lots. This is yet another reason why I would like to begin a public discussion on current zoning regulations and the pattern of development they are likely to produce in Lexington.

5. *Recent years have seen an increase in the number of small houses being torn down and replaced with larger homes, which are often built at the limit of the setback rules. What can the Planning Board do to address this phenomenon?*

With the support of Town Meeting, the Planning Board could implement zoning regulations to address this phenomenon, often referred to as mansionization. In one neighborhood, Lexington residents described how a large new house, towering over their existing homes, creates light spill that prevents them from sleeping. Again, I would like to start a public discussion to see if a majority of residents are concerned about negative impacts in their neighborhood, and what, if anything, they want to do about it.

6. *What would be your criteria, as a Planning Board member, to approve a residential zoning special permit?*

My criterion to approve a residential special permit would be that the applicant's proposal balances the Town priorities listed in the 2002 Comprehensive Plan with the owner's objectives. I have spoken often at Planning Board meetings about new development being "shoehorned" onto property without regard to the site's natural features like topography and trees or cultural features like historic architecture, stone walls, or view sheds. I believe good design can accommodate new building without trashing a site and its neighborhood.

7. *What role can the Planning Board play in addressing the capacity issues in our schools?*

I think it is up to Lexington residents and Town Meeting to decide if the population of Lexington and its school age children should grow through the addition of housing throughout town. The 2002 Comprehensive Plan states, "Given the mature status of land development, major departures from present land uses, densities, and present land management systems should occur only for important reasons..." The construction of affordable housing is certainly an important reason, but are there others? If Lexington residents decide that they would like to maintain the current density of development, the Planning Board could then support them by introducing zoning regulations (for approval by Town Meeting) to achieve their goals.

8. *What role can the Planning Board play in ensuring a diversity of commercial activity in the center? Specifically, how would you address the number of banks and other financial service businesses in the center?*

Article 53 proposes a one-year moratorium on new or expanded banks in "Center storefronts" in the Central Business (CB) Zoning District. The CB District extends along Mass Ave from Merriam to Grant and includes commercial properties on Muzzey and Waltham. Center storefronts are the ground floor levels that have frontage on a public way or public parking lot.

I support the moratorium in an effort to begin a public dialogue on the use of Center storefronts as offices. However, I would want to keep an open mind about the best way to address the number of Center banks until that public process was complete. Banks are and traditionally have been important Town partners in promoting business and supporting civic institutions. As the banking industry has changed from local person-to-person retail transactions to national electronic service and product promotion, banks have transitioned from vital community hubs to offices, as evidenced by the views in windows along Depot Square and Mass Ave. Some of the negative perceptions of this transition are that office space in Center storefronts 1) limits the opportunities for other retail use; 2) limits the hours storefronts are open, making the Center appear lifeless; and 3) puts pressure on Center parking for office staff that could work elsewhere. If Town Meeting approves the moratorium, it would signal a majority agrees there is a problem. The year-long moratorium would in turn provide the impetus to hold a thorough public discussion—including residents, merchants, landlords and bankers—to develop agreements or zoning mechanisms to best steward the evolution of our Center and to create the Lexington we want.

9. *Hartwell is the largest commercial district in Lexington, and on average the area generates \$8M in tax revenue annually. Yet Hartwell Ave area office space vacancies have been approximately 22% in 2014, compared with 4% for Hayden Ave and Spring St area office spaces. What should Lexington do, in your opinion, to build up the infrastructure and amenities around Hartwell Ave?*

The vacancies along Hartwell Avenue reflect the regional real estate market; Hartwell properties are generally a smaller scale than the properties occupied in South Lexington, and for those smaller scale spaces, comparable offices in say, Waltham may be more attractive to businesses. I think the Town's current proposals to encourage food and retail services and improve sidewalks and transit options in the area are worthwhile endeavors.

10. *Over the last year, can you describe one issue which the Planning Board handled very effectively? And one issue that could have been addressed better?*

Having served on the Planning Board since last summer, I am astonished at the dedication of the volunteer members and professional staff. My answers above repeat the issue I would like the Planning Board to address, or rather, revisit, through a town-wide public process: What are the current and projected adverse impacts of development and what, if anything, should we do about them?

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 Saturday, Feb 7th, 2015. Responses will not be edited, and will run as submitted. They will be posted on lex-wiki.org in PDF format and announced through other town media. Questionnaire coordinator: Andrei Radulescu-Banu (bitdribble@gmail.com, 617-216-8509).
