

Questions for Town Council Candidates 2015

1. What are your thoughts on the current animal control ordinance? Did you vote in the special election held on December 4th, 2013 and if so, how did you vote and why did you vote that way? Should you be elected, are you open to a review of the ordinance to see how it is working? How do you feel about the role the USFW played in this issue in our town?

For the most part I think the Animal control ordinance is adequate; however I do think that section *10 Restricted Areas* is too rigid. If I understand correctly, the Plover nesting locations can change from year to year. If that is in fact the case then it might make more sense to review these locations on a regular interval to ensure a) the proper protection is being granted to the plovers which are a protected species and b) that not too much of the beach is restricted unnecessarily. Perhaps retaining the simple statement of restricted access “to roped off areas” would be sufficient. In terms of section *604-10 Public Beaches and Shores* I don’t believe dogs are the problem but I do believe that irresponsible owners are. As such banning a leashed, controlled animal is not the solution in my mind. I would prefer to remove the outright ban but increase and strongly enforce the leash restrictions during the posted dates and times. I would also support increased enforcement and fines for those owners that choose not to comply with the rules. In terms of allowing animals to run free on voice or sight command, I have found that the level in which a pet is under command can be subjective based on the owners bias. Due to the sensitivity of the other animals and people on the beach, I feel that voice command is not a sufficient means of control on the beach. I believe that other recreational open spaces of the town, such as Memorial Park or other town recreational areas that do not have clear habitat restrictions, are more conducive to allowing dogs to run under voice command. As I am not currently a dog owner however, I would be open to listening and/or reviewing any study or statistically based information that would indicate that my opinion is inaccurate.

2. Why are you running for Council? List your top three priorities and proposed solutions and the single most important thing you hope to accomplish as a Town Councilor.

I am running for Town Council because I want to change the divisive nature in which many issues in our town are being addressed. Public debate is the cornerstone of our Democratic form of government. Decorum, civility and mutual respect used to be the standards of such debates. It seems however over the past few years, not only in Scarborough but from a broader cultural perspective, that every major issue devolves into a polarizing discussion between the two sides with neither willing to truly listen to the other or work collaboratively in the best interest of resolving the issue.

My top three priorities as a councilor would be;

- 1) Reestablishing Trust in our town government – I am a Businessman by profession and an Engineer by training so I prefer facts and figures to rhetoric. I think a

Professional municipal government organization summed it up perfectly when they proposed the following formula for building trust in a community;

Transparency + Engagement + Performance + Accountability = Trust.

The reality is no matter who is elected on Nov 3, each councilor only gets to cast one vote among seven. In my opinion building consensus within the entire community through mutual respect and collaboration is the only way progress can occur in our town. If elected, I will strive to do my part and adhere to this formula for success and try to lead by example.

- 2) Developing a predictable and sustainable budget – I believe there are some real and effective parallels that can be drawn between how government and the private sector should effectively operate. The need for clear communication, accountability and performance are great examples of such parallels. However anyone who has had experience in the Public sector knows that government cannot and should not be run like a private business. Simply “spreadsheet managing” budgets and decrying that year over year expense increases should not exceed “X” amount, without clearly understanding the role and function the services that town government provides to our ENTIRE community, is a recipe for disaster. According to the 2015 Comprehensive Annual Finance report for Scarborough, (i.e. our independent auditors report) in 2014 the schools made up **53.7%** of Scarborough’s net expenditures. That same years report for the town of Cape Elizabeth shows schools made up **70%** of their net expenditures. It seems clear to me that the question is not are our schools operating inefficiently, but how we as a community are choosing to invest our limited resources. I am the only candidate running with experience in developing and managing municipal budgets. This experience will be critical to our town if we are going to quickly, efficiently and effectively find ways to develop town wide budgets that are fair to everyone and are predictable and sustainable.
- 3) Developing effective “Aging in place” policies – On a property valuation basis Scarborough is the third wealthiest community in the entire State. As such no elderly person in this town should ever have to choose between paying their taxes or buying groceries, medicines or heating oil. If Augusta is unwilling to provide the relief seniors in our State deserve by continually voting to remove programs such as the circuit breaker program, then we need to look beyond Augusta towards other communities around the nation for models that are working. Then we need to take what will work for Scarborough, develop a local program and implement it. If Augusta ties our hands or places unrealistic barriers to our progress then we need to push our legislative representatives to advocate for new legislation to remove those barriers. If Augusta continues to insist on shifting more of the burden of expenses down to the municipal level, then they should be prepared to allow us to find our own innovative solutions to meet those burdens.

3. Do you believe that there is an apparent lack of trust in town governance and our local process? Why or why not? If you do believe trust is a concern what do you attribute that to? What personal attributes would you bring to address that concern and what steps do you believe the current and future Councils could take to rebuild trust in the community?

Please refer to question 2 Priority 1.

4. What do you consider an appropriate tax increase for the next fiscal year? What do you consider an appropriate yearly increase for our school budget? What are your thoughts on this year's budget process? Please include ideas for change or improvement including any cost-revenue analysis you might conduct.

Please refer to question 2 Priority 2.

5. How should the Council / Town deal with its current level of debt?

Again here is another great parallel with the business community. As an individual we naturally want to become debt free. We understand that this will allow us to devote more personal income towards improving our quality of life rather than paying interest to a bank or a credit card company. That isn't necessarily the case in government or in business. As interest rates decrease and the need for large capital projects such as the Wentworth school become necessary, it is prudent for our town to finance these projects through the use of "low cost capital" in the form of debt. Effective capital management involves taking on debt at the right time and properly managing it. Even the wealthiest and most profitable companies in the world like Apple carry debt. To me the question should be "Have we taken on too much debt in comparison to our market valuation?" My opinion and the opinion of our National Bond rating agencies is no. If our town was taking on more debt than we could support then the market would negatively react to this and lower the town's bond rating. Our bond rating is in essence a measure of how risky it is for an institution to lend our town money, very similar to a person's credit score. The higher the rating, the less likely we are to default and the more access we have to lower interest rates. Two separate bond agencies gave Scarborough very favorable marks. Again I will refer to page 33 of our independent auditors report from 2015.

Moody's Investors Service has given the Town of Scarborough a bond rating of "Aa3" and affirmed the Aa3 rating on all of the town's outstanding debt. Per Moody's Investors Service rating report dated April 24, 2014, "The Aa3 rating reflects the town's satisfactory financial position, stable tax base with favorable wealth levels and an above average debt burden with slow amortization. Additionally, Moody sights the Town's stable tax base with above average wealth levels and a manageable pension burden as strengths and recognizes these challenges (maintaining sufficient reserve levels, reducing the General Fund subsidy of tax increment financing (TIF) district debt and addressing rising expenditures including education with limited revenue raising ability).

Standard and Poor's Rating Services (S&P) has assigned its "AA" long-term rating to the Town of Scarborough, Maine's series 2014 general obligation (GO) bonds and affirmed its AA long-term rating and underlying rating on the town's existing GO debt. S&P's rating reflects their opinion of the Town's:

- Very strong economy, which benefits from participation in the broad and diverse economy of Portland, Maine;
- Adequate budgetary flexibility, with available reserves above 5% of general fund expenditures for the three most recent audited years;
- Strong budgetary performance, with slight general fund deficits and operating surpluses in total governmental funds;
- Very strong liquidity, providing very strong cash levels to cover both debt service and expenditures;
- Strong management conditions, with formalized practices and a consistent ability to maintain balanced budgets; and
- Adequate debt and contingent liabilities profile, driven mostly by the town's low net direct debt as a percent of market value.

This does not mean that I am advocating for taking on more debt. Any new major bonds would need to go through the same town wide voter approval process as the Wentworth school project did. I am only pointing out that our current debt level is not considered excessive and is being managed properly.

6. What are your thoughts on the recent controversy over access and parking at Higgins beach? If elected, how would you address similar citizen concerns?

In my opinion the Parking issue at Higgins Beach appears to be one of a lack of enforcement of existing ordinances and not a question of are those ordinances ineffective and in need of revision. We currently have several Resource officers placed in various school facilities throughout the district. This is a very effective way to not only educate students on important safety issues such as substance abuse; it also helps build comfort and trust between our children and our local law enforcement. Perhaps something similar to this could be initiated in the Higgins Beach neighborhood in the form of a Neighborhood policing program? Ultimately we live in a litigious society where issues are seldom clearly defined in black or white. When such gray areas arise the formal mediation and/or arbitration processes are accepted means of resolving conflict. As a councilor my approach would be to openly engage all concerned parties in a public forum. That forum would have clear rules of decorum in which discussions could be open, transparent and above all respectful with the intent of reaching a compromise. Then the only action required by the council would be to enact the compromise and thus hopefully avoid the large public discourse that has regularly accompanied many issues that have recently come before the council.

7. Do you think it would be appropriate or in the town's best interest to explore its right of eminent domain for access at Higgin beach? This could effectively end the ownership debate proactively. Why would you or would you not support that approach?

In my opinion Property rights are a cornerstone of our culture and our society. I think that home ownership encourages people to engage in their community and has been and should continue to be a very integral part of achieving what we might consider "the American Dream". I firmly believe that any government entity that would consider invoking eminent domain should have a very sound legal, moral and ethical position before seizing a citizen's property. Ethically I would expect that every and all possible means of resolution would be attempted before considering pursuing such a Draconian action. As I am not a Lawyer, I would rely strongly on the advice of the Towns Legal counsel as to whether or not it would be legally prudent to seek a resolution through eminent domain.