

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?

My vote in December of 2012 was *my* vote. At the time, I was not a dog owner. I was the parent of two small children, both of whom had been bitten by dogs, and irresponsible dog owners were at the forefront of my mind. We preferred to go to the beach in the evening, and the visits would have been significantly more pleasant without furry picnic-invaders and exuberant pups zooming around. I voted against it. As a rule, I don't believe in collective punishment, but as a father, I didn't think twice.

As a councilor, I will have constituents to consider. I will have to vote in the town's best interests, not just my own. It's easy to Monday morning quarterback and say that, had I been on the council in 2012, I would have voted differently, but I wasn't in the room, and I didn't follow the debate very closely. Looking back, it seems like the ordinance change was an overreaction to a singular, albeit very concerning, event. I am glad that the D.O.G.S. group organized and did what you thought was right. Though it's unlikely that I will ever match your passion toward your cause, your decision to work together for meaningful change is an example of democracy at its finest.

I am not unhappy with what I know about the current animal control ordinance. I feel like we came to a good compromise and struck an appropriate balance. Could improvements be made? Almost certainly. I am, and will remain, open to hearing your perspective.

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 got into this race because I have grown increasingly concerned over a number of years with our dysfunctional school budget process. The school budget referendum is the only opportunity at the local, state, or federal level that provides an opportunity to say "my taxes are too high." The school budget referendum is the wrong place to express that sentiment.

This past summer, we went through three rounds of contentious voting and, at the end of the day, gave the school department a quarter million dollars less than what they needed to provide exactly what they did last year. The net savings on the mil rate was 6 cents. That is \$18 a year on the average house in town or \$60 a year on a million dollar home. We are collectively being penny-wise and pound-foolish. Projecting this behavior over a number of years, the average

taxpayer is saving potentially hundreds of dollars a year, but is jeopardizing tens of thousands of dollars in home equity.

If I can accomplish only one objective in my term of office, it will be to improve the tone and tenor of the public debate. The problem, as I see it, stems from poor communication, between the town and our residents and between parties that disagree. I want to encourage more dialogue between groups that disagree with each other. I would like to see more engagement between town councilors and the public. I also want to have neighborhood potluck suppers and Dr. George Entwistle-esque listening sessions where two sides of an issue can civilly discuss potential solutions to the problems facing our town.

I want to build a greater sense of community. Bath has a couple of examples that I would like to copy. They have an annual event called "Random Acts of Kindness Day" where you can, among other fun activities, have your portrait drawn by a child, enjoy donated flowers, or visit the "Wisdom Station" and get great life advice. They also have a facebook page called "Spotted in Bath" that highlights "acts of kindness and generosity" witnessed in the community. Let's start something similar here in Scarborough.

Additionally, I want to see the development of more affordable housing so that the people that work in this town, our younger police officers, firemen, and teachers, can afford to live here. This is going to require some form of creative engagement with real-estate developers.

We need to continue to plan for smart and deliberate economic growth. We have a compelling story and are set up for years of prosperity, but 25 years from now I want to look back and see that we preserved our rich character, our history, and our open spaces.

We also need to improve our services for our senior residents. I'd like to see a better solution for our senior activity center, more access to transportation, housing, and general assistance. I'd also like to see the expansion of senior tax relief.

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?

Yes, I believe that there is a sizable segment of the population that lacks trust in our municipal government. I attribute this, largely, to poor information flow. Everyone is entitled to interpret information in his or her own way, but a source of truth does exist and we need to agree on the parameters of the debate.

To that end, I would propose the creation of a position for director of communications. We need a professional who can, for instance, digest the technical data from the finance departments and distribute it for consumption by the average human being. We need that information proactively delivered to the populous, we need it consolidated in one place, and we need it to be accurate.

In an attempt for transparency in my own campaign, I am providing regular updates on my Facebook page when I meet with individuals and groups for information gathering. As a councilor, I would strive for a similar level of transparency and would provide regular opportunities for constituents to weigh in on concerns. One thought I had was to make myself available once a month for "Coffee with a Councilor."

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.

I appreciate this question, and I understand where you are coming from. I am reluctant to set a target range without a more thorough understanding of our needs for next year and our cost drivers. I expect health insurance to rise next year after a few years of negative or negligible growth. That will have a significant impact on our school budget, which is primarily driven by labor costs. I also expect further cuts from Augusta in the next biennium.

With the benefit of hindsight, I will tell you that I think the 2.6% percent increase in the tax rate last year was slightly too low. For those of you who are still reading after that admission, I can tell you that I would have preferred an additional 10 cents or so in the mil rate. That would have allowed for a small increase over level service to the school and town budgets and still left us with a tax increase of just over 3%.

In 2012, Saco had a budget increase of almost 19%! Imagine how devastating that would be in a single year. If we focus solely on de minimis tax increases, we put ourselves in danger of a similar significant tax increase. We need to focus on stability and predictability in our tax rate. As a town, we have to be thinking long term and we have to be investing in our future.

Budgeting is about setting priorities and compromise. Responsible town governing bodies plan for the future; we fix the roof when the sun is shining, and we hunker down when the storm is raging.

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

I believe Scarborough's public debt obligations are quite high. We do have significant capital needs in our town for which we need to start planning and about which we need to start talking. We need to examine our debt schedule to determine when we could address those needs as bonds are retired. Additional debt obligations would appropriately require a public referendum. Given my current understanding of our needs and our debt schedules, I would be reluctant to take on new debt in the next 3 years.

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?

I believe there is a problem at Higgins Beach that needs to be addressed. I don't believe that the proposed change fixes the problem. I believe that there should be some seasonal parking spots on Bayview so that people can come to walk their dog or swing by for a quick lunch. I think we need a creative, collaborative solution and I think we can find one, but it will take open dialogue. I recently met with a group of homeowners at Higgins beach; I believe that they appreciated being listened to. I look forward to hearing from those on the other side of this issue. There is a compromise to be had here.

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?

I think suggesting eminent domain at this juncture is premature and overly inflammatory. I would love to find a permanent solution to the problem, and I believe that we can without the expropriation of private property.