



City Councilor Survey Responses - Vicki Danberg

1. Do you support the Mayor's "Booster Stabilization Fund"? What are its strengths and what should change?

Newton is very fortunate to have received this substantial amount of one time funds. The Mayor, a prudent financial manager of the City's funds, has made a decision on the disbursement of these funds that is certainly a move that furthers the City's financial stability.

However, I feel this decision is overly conservative at this time when we have pressing needs in a number of our school facilities that could be alleviated by a one time infusion of money to correct them and make the temperature in classrooms more comfortable for children and teachers who have suffered in hot classrooms for too long.

I also would like to see some of these funds used to provide catch-up programs for the many children who have fallen behind due to the needed closure of schools during the COVID pandemic.

I believe we could accomplish the above while still having a substantial amount of the funds, say half of them, available to do the "buy down" of our debt service suggested by the Administration.

2. What do you view as the relationship between new development (housing, commercial) and the schools?

Newton is losing school population at a rate of a couple hundred students or more per year. In the past five years we have lost around 1300 students from the system. We are looking at the very real possibility of having to consolidate some of our elementary schools due to loss of enrollment.

Newton lacks sufficient housing to serve its needs; affordable, middle income and market rate housing. We need them all because affordable housing must be subsidized by market rate housing. Many young families with children cannot afford to buy a home in Newton so it is up to us to find a way to attract them so we are not just a graying community who turns its back on the lifeblood of our schools.

Northland, for example, will have around 200 permanently affordable units available to renters with incomes at 80-120% of area mean income. This can attract some young families with children for our schools.

Many empty nesters who would like to downsize from their 4 bedroom homes yet stay in Newton, can afford market rate units, but have nowhere to go unless we build them. They would be vacating homes suitable for families, which would accelerate the supply of homes available for younger families with children in our schools.

So there is a direct relationship between development and homes for families with school age children, so needed to keep Newton schools viable and healthy.

3. **Please share your thoughts on the national teacher shortage, and how it impacts Newton's ability to attract and retain strong educators. Does a city councilor have a role? What is it?**

There is a national teacher shortage that means there is stiff competition for dedicated, experienced teachers. Newton has always prided itself in attracting the very best teachers. We can only do this if our salaries and working conditions are competitive and we are showing cracks in our competitiveness as compared to our surrounding communities.

The City Councilor's role is formally limited to a thumbs up or thumbs down of the Administration's budget, including the school portion, but councilors can certainly voice their opinions on this as well as all on issues that affect the City.

4. **Operating overrides help ensure the health of our schools. What is your plan for and role in ensuring successful overrides?**

This past operating override was not Newton's first that failed. I think that Newton's mistake has been too infrequent overrides for too high an amount each time.

Some nearby communities have had much better success having nearly annual overrides for smaller amounts often tied to specific projects. I would suggest this as a way to achieve better success.

5. **The current contract offers teachers a COLA of 2% or less. NPS Unit C employees report a non-living wage. Do you believe it is reasonable to expect the NTA to accept the current terms? How can you, as a city councilor, advocate for a fair contract?**

I have walked in the shoes of our educators for twelve years as a former high school teacher. I have always supported a living wage and fair contract terms for teachers and all City employees.

While active negotiations are going on, I must decline to comment any further on contract negotiations or terms, as they are in the hands of the NTA, School Committee, Superintendent and the Administration. While we can cheer our educators on, the City Council plays no role in the actual negotiation.