

2/25/2021

Housing for All 2021 Questionnaire for Select Board Candidates

Housing for All Acton is a coalition of residents and professionals involved in promoting affordable housing. Our Mission Statement is as follows:

“We believe that Acton can and should be an inclusive community with housing options to meet the needs of people at different incomes, household types, and stages of life. For Acton to meet the housing needs of current and future residents we support the creation of new housing including multi-family housing, housing for people with limited incomes, and housing for people with special needs, as well as embracing reusing existing housing for new housing needs.

Housing for All will actively support policies, developments, and projects that we believe will make Acton a more inclusive community and facilitate the creation of new housing opportunities, especially housing that meets identified community needs including increasing access to Acton housing for those who work in the community. We seek to work with residents, and others who care about Acton to advance the goal of an inclusive and welcoming community.”

We invite you to respond to the following questions that are relevant to housing issues in Acton and to your role as a leader on these issues. We will distribute responses to the questionnaire to our mailing list and to other interested organizations and provide the response to the news media. Please provide your response by Friday March 12th. Please email your response to: frannyola@gmail.com

1) The Boston region suffers from a severe housing shortage. Rents and home prices in Acton and the region are high and rising, with negative consequences for our community and the wider region. Creating more homes is critical to solving the twin crises of shortage and unaffordability.

What role, if any, should the Town of Acton take in supporting the development of multifamily housing, whether deed-restricted affordable (reserved for low- to moderate-income households), “workforce,” or market-rate? Please explain.

First, I'd like to express my appreciation for your organization and the work that you do. My beliefs are closely aligned with Housing for All Acton's -among my top stated priorities are finding ways to build and/ or repurpose real estate in Acton to create affordable housing.

I think Acton should carefully examine the definition of what they are calling “affordable”. Most properties built under the 40B law are not affordable to families making under \$50K. I think Acton needs to examine our current housing stock and start some sort of program that buys condos priced up to \$200,000, deed restrict them and add to the affordable housing stock. It would also be advantageous for the town to add another rental unit like Avalon to an area of town close to the train station and within close proximity to area amenities.

2) Acton has recently achieved “safe harbor” status under the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40B, including by attaining the “10%” minimum threshold for affordable housing units. Do you think the Town of Acton should still encourage developers to create affordable housing and if so, what tools do you envision using to encourage affordable housing development?

Determining the difference between affordable housing and calling housing “affordable” built under the 40B Law needs to be defined by the town. The fact that we are at “safe harbor” status is great, however, that will not last given our current approach of using the 40B law to meet our affordable housing needs. If we keep doing what we’re doing, we will constantly be trying to meet 10 % as our population/housing stock increases.

Acton needs to figure out an equitable way to renovate current housing stock, using cleaner heating sources and green renovations, to add to our affordable housing stock. I will bring experience to the board from my work as a realtor, my position on the Historic District Commission, and my commitment to racial justice.

3) A new Massachusetts law requires that all communities served by the MBTA, including Acton, create districts proximate to transit that are zoned for multi-family housing development to remain eligible for competitive state grants like MassWorks. What steps would you take to comply with this new state legislation?

As a town we need to determine our values and what is important to us as a community. We also need to balance our Historic Districts with our housing demands, “affordable” or not.

Recently the ACHC proposed a plan to allow property owners in the historic districts to turn single family homes into multi-family homes where feasible. In theory, this is a great idea- but before implementing this, or any other plan, I think we need to take stock of our current landscape. This should not be an overly drawn-out process, but it makes sense to check the landscape before you change it. We need to determine how many multi-family homes are in existence in each district and how they are being used.

In my anecdotal experience as a realtor listing multi-family homes, which are almost always located in more densely populated village areas and sometimes in Historic Districts, potential buyers would come to the open house and ask, “how easy would it be to turn this home into a single family?” I think it is very important for Acton to collect data on our current housing stock, how it is being used and figure out housing needs/trends for the future.

4) A related question is: Many of those concerned about climate change are encouraging multi-family housing development in walkable neighborhoods near transit is a necessary step in reducing carbon emissions. Do you agree and if you agree; what steps should Acton take in this area?

Building new is not always the answer to align with climate change. New builds are more taxing on the town infrastructure as well as water resources. Climate change is a major issue and a healthy environmental future should be a part of considerations in all areas of town governance. There are several environmental groups doing great work here in town, and I’d look forward to working with them to help guide these decisions.

5) Housing advocates and the parents of special needs children have identified affordable housing for people with special needs as an important priority for Acton. What steps would you take or support to advance the goal of increasing affordable special needs housing opportunities in Acton.

Familiarizing myself with and attending the Committee on Disabilities meetings is a priority for me. The town of Acton has many great commissions that do great work for the town and I am looking forward to learning more and working with these great committees.

6) Do you believe mixed use development that includes multifamily housing should be considered in the redevelopment of the “K-Mart” parcel?

The town needs to determine whether or not the Kmart parcel is something we would like to pursue, acquire and develop. I think a project of this magnitude would need community input and take years to come to fruition. I have been listening to community members’ visions for the parcel and some expressed the wish for a community center, others mixed used: retail & housing and others low-cost shopping.

It has been difficult seeing Kmart empty for almost a year and the McDonald’s parcel empty for close to 16 years. These properties have so much potential, and we must prioritize tapping these spaces in our community. We need to also focus on other empty commercial storefronts in the community. Filling these could also ease our property tax burden, another goal of my campaign to join the BOS.

7) Do you believe the Town of Acton should actively promote economic and racial diversity? If you do agree; what specific steps should the Town take toward this goal in housing policy to promote diversity?

The Town of Acton should actively work on ways to make our diverse community members/residents feel welcome and included. If Acton is a warm welcoming place folks will want to move here. Linking affordable housing with diversity is hurtful to our Black, Indigenous and people of color Actonians who pay their fair share to the community by paying taxes and volunteering on many of our boards both elected and non-elected.

8) Have you ever publicly supported an affordable housing development here in Acton? Please describe the development and how and why you supported it.

While I fully support the senior housing at Kelley’s Corner and the AHA’s senior housing rental complex planned for 368 Main Street (Walker land), and I attended both forums that were held specifically for community member input for the Main Street parcel, I would not say my support was public. I am equally excited for the dog park to be adjacent to the Main Street complex. I think this is a great example of mixed-land use.

9) Have you ever publicly opposed an affordable housing development in Acton? Please describe the development and how and why you opposed it.

Whenever I have been opposed to a specific 40B “affordable” housing project it has not been because it is an affordable housing project. My opposition in specific developments has been looking through the lens of a preservationist. I have lived here for 30 years and have seen many of our cultural resources (antique housing stock, historic mills, barns, etc.) demolished and replaced with developments that fall under the 40B “affordable” housing stock but really not affordable to a lot of folks.

I strongly believe in genuinely affordable housing, and at the same time I believe in supporting development that values our historic, cultural and outdoor spaces.

10) Do you have any other thoughts or experiences to share regarding affordable housing?

Thank you for Housing for All 's excellent questions. I appreciate your work, and I hope to continue this conversation as a member of the Board of Selectmen. In the meantime, please feel free to reach out to me via my website at <https://franarsenault.com/> or my campaign FB page at <https://www.facebook.com/Vote4FranActon> with any further questions.

Submit responses to frannyola@gmail.com by March 12, 2021