

My Southborough's Highlights from Candidates Night 2015

Selectman Candidates' Q&A

(Candidates incumbent Bill Boland, Desiree Aselbekian, and Brian Shea)

If money wasn't an issue, what would their top capital investment priority be?

- **Shea** touted the need for a new public safety building that meets police safety requirements
- **Aselbekian** believed the town needs a building that better serves the whole community. She saw public safety as part of that but also more hearing and meeting rooms and perhaps other services like the senior center or library.
- **Boland** focused on a new public safety building

Is it wrong to charge town committees for access to the town's public records? (Question included a reference to the Open Space Preservation Commission being charged)

- **Boland** defended that OSPC was offered electronic records but asked instead for paper copies that by law cost \$0.20 per copy.
He said that the charges for records requests are required by state law. He furthered that easily accessed and emailed documents (like last year's budget) can be emailed for no charge. But researched items require charging for the time of the town's lowest paid, qualified employee. (So, while the town supposedly paid for Town Counsel's time to research some of the request, they charged a lower rate.)
Finally, he claimed that it was the Town Treasurer who told them that OSPC's request couldn't be funded through the Town's budget. "Complex issues require research. In most cases, people are given a fairly accurate forecast of what that's going to cost."
- **Shea** acknowledged the commitment made by volunteers and hoped that improving cooperation between committees could "get to the point where we don't even need to make public records requests." He would also like to implement having all town committee members use town email addresses to simplify access to emails, rather than individuals digging through their own work and personal emails.
- **Aselbekian** said she "take[s] pause at charging boards and committees for documents that aid them in doing their work." She believes residents should be able to easily search for all the information they need on the town website. She said the committee responsible for the new website lacks a quorum. Therefore, she sees BOS as responsible for ensuring the new site "includes forms, documentation, and all public records that originate electronically should be available through the website."
- **Boland's** closing rebuttal to Shea's recommendation (above). He opposed having committee members using town email addresses. "I can't disagree with that more. We had a situation years ago. . . with a town official that got a couple of problems I would hate to see that he was doing some of that stuff under his town email address, which now brings the town in liability for all of that. You want to look at my emails. . . I'll give you whatever you want."

Referring to the **Demolition Delay Bylaw's demolition by neglect clause**, is the town obligated to inform owners of effected properties that they now have new maintenance requirements? And is preservation worth intrusion on owners' rights?

- **Shea** said he is in favor of the concept but opposed how it was done. Prior to Town Meeting, he counseled the Historic Commission's against moving forward without holding public forums and

hearings to solicit community input. At Town Meeting he was the only one to urge postponing the bylaw vote to next year.

- **Aselbekian** voted for it but was also among the small minority to vote for three failed amendments by Boland and Selectwoman Bonnie Phaneuf to limit the bylaw. But she is confident that the bylaw's clause is not triggered until a demolition permit is pulled. She said the commission is appointed by the BOS and she looks forward to working with them to make sure public outreach happens.
- **Boland** motioned at Town Meeting to remove the neglect clause. He was looking to protect people who can't afford to maintain their old homes (or "chicken coops" on the historic list.) Because the clause remained, he opposed the bylaw. He also worries based on feedback from a resident that the market for antique homes may have passed. But he trusts in the town's Building Inspector, "a rational thinker". "We're not going to see the problems under the demolition by neglect that I worried about. And if we do, let's go back to Town Meeting and repeal it."

What do they think of the town's transportation problems (north to south and no safe walking to the commuter rail) and the town's long term plan for "complete streets" (with sidewalks and room for biking)?

- **Aselbekian** sees a "much more comprehensive plan that needs to take place for transportation issues and sidewalk issues". She pointed again to the Town's lack of community vision. She pointed to binders full of past town studies, plans and surveys "that we have spent thousands of dollars on . . . sitting there" and going unused. And she said the town needs someone with a fresh perspective to make bold decisions to start moving the community forward, in a comprehensive way, to deliver the services taxpayers demand and deserve.
- **Shea** referred to his experience on the Main Street Design Committee. He pointed out that there is a large capital cost for transportation projects. He also said that he loves riding his bike and understands desire for complete streets. But he pointed out the need to consider the impact on the rural character for some roads where it would require removal of large and old trees, plus land takings and other issues. He said a realistic plan is needed that factors in all the issues.
- **Boland** said the town is trying to get more sidewalks on busy streets including Marlboro and Framingham roads and they need to continue to work on that. He cautioned it will be difficult over causeways because the state doesn't want to widen anything there.

The selectman spoke about his experience with Main Street and the compromise they reached for future "share the road" lanes on sections of Main Street to avoid additionally widening the road for bikes. He referred to his work on the Town's Master Plan with recommended zoning changes and his past, long work on the Zoning Advisory Committee. He noted that ZAC couldn't get complete buy in. "So, it might have been a bit overreaching, trying to completely redo the whole zoning code."

Boland also took to opportunity to readdress transparency, turning it back around on residents needing to pay attention: "We're getting ready to go through with some of these things after three years of very public, open meetings, and people 'how come we didn't know this was going on?' So, citizens have to get involved and look at it."