

Tom Myers

Re-election to the Hamilton Select Board



Background/Introduction.

I am running for a second term on the Hamilton Select Board. I have been a resident of Hamilton for 14 years. I was born and raised on the North Shore in Danvers, spent some time in the city and returned to the North Shore to settle down and raise a family. My wife and I have 3 kids, two are currently at Cutler, and the third will be at Cutler in a couple years.

I work as an attorney and spent the first half of my career in private practice representing individuals with disabilities. For the last 8 years, I have worked for the Commonwealth of MA as an attorney for the Department of Early Education and Care, and most recently as the General Counsel and Chief Privacy Officer for the State Secretary of Technology. During my career, I have had the opportunity to manage a large budget, engage in public policy initiatives, and lead long term strategic planning. During my time in Hamilton, I served 3 years on the Conservation Commission and have spent the last 3 years on the Hamilton Select Board.

I first ran for office for a few reasons; I wanted to become more engaged in the community, meet new people, and because I really enjoy working in public policy. I enjoy tackling large complicated issues, building consensus, and finding solutions. I try to look holistically at problems and understand both the short and long term impacts. Growing up in Danvers, I always knew Hamilton to be the farm town with high taxes. So when my wife and I chose Hamilton, we knew what we were getting into. But we chose Hamilton because we love the small-town feel and the unique

character. Our family loves to hike, be outdoors, and the quaint New England feel.. We love the ability to walk downtown and the proximity to the parks and schools. As a member of the Select Board, my goal is to continue to help Hamilton maintain healthy growth in order to manage our tax rate while also maintaining our beautiful character. To do this, we need to continue mapping our long term capital investments, prioritizing those investments, considering strategic and modest development to diversify our revenue streams, and most importantly, finding better ways to engage the community as a whole. These are priorities I will continue to focus on as a member of the Board.

1. How do you plan to balance investments in our schools and infrastructure with tax impact?

Hamilton has high taxes - no one disputes that. I am often asked how we can significantly reduce our taxes, but the reality is, we are unlikely to see a significant tax reduction. That doesn't mean we can't manage our tax rate to avoid significant year over year increases and overrides, but it does mean that we pay a higher premium to live in Hamilton and to preserve its character. Hamilton does not have a significant commercial tax base, and is unlikely to develop any meaningful commercial base that will have a dramatic impact on the tax rate. Residential development is also limited. Most of the currently undeveloped land is subject to some sort of zoning or wetland restrictions making it nearly impossible for development. This is great for open space, but challenging for building revenue. Hamilton receives little in state grant assistance, so a majority of its revenue is from the individual taxpayer.

So there's the bad news, what is the good news? We live in a beautiful town. Most of us moved here for that rural small town feel and sense of community. We can maintain that while also making strategic investments in our infrastructure coupled with some modest and sensible development to help stabilize our tax rate. First, we need to work closely with all town boards and commissions to understand future capital needs and then build out a long term capital investment plan. The Town already engages in this work, but I would emphasize that we need to better prioritize those capital needs. To do this, we need better engagement with the Community to ensure they have a say in that prioritization. The Town can be completely transparent about its actions, but if it's not providing the right opportunities for engagement and feedback, what is the point? I plan to do better in this regard and ensure there are multiple avenues to provide feedback outside of your typical public comment at a Board meeting. Next, we need to act on that capital plan and make data driven decisions to ensure we are making the right investments at the right time. We need

to be proactive at applying for state grants and be agile enough to switch gears when funding opportunities are presented. Long term financial planning is a must to ensure we avoid an override each year.

We also need to consider sensible development, both commercial and residential, that is modest and meets the character of the neighbor. I am already involved in downtown zoning development that will impose design standards. This type of zoning will allow for new business to come to Hamilton while providing the town a greater sense of control on aesthetics. This will diversify our revenue streams, grow the small business community, and bring an overall better quality of life to Hamilton residents by providing access to new business and activities.

2. If the school consolidation project doesn't pass, as a select board member, what will your next steps be?

First, we need to look at the vote and see how close it was. That may tell us whether we were on the right track, or way off. Next, we need to debrief and strategize on next steps. We need to think about whether we look to renovate without state assistance or submit another statement of interest to the MSBA. We need to deeply engage town boards, the school, and the community to understand what is going to garner enough support to pass, while also not crippling the town financially. A high level cost analysis will be needed on all options to understand the financial impact.

Regardless of what we decide for next steps, we would need to plan for significant financial impact. If we propose to resubmit to MSBA, we may end up waiting several years to get back into the program. Based on current data from MSBA, construction rates have been trending upwards for years and will likely continue to rise. That option will also require another \$1M+ feasibility study. If we decide to renovate without state assistance, the full financial impact will be felt by the taxpayers. There would need to be significant engagement with the Community to develop a plan that would be successful.

I do want to stress to everyone that the current elementary schools are not meeting the needs of the district, both from a size/capacity perspective and also from a programming perspective. The goal of this project is to not only meet the current needs, but to plan for future needs; hence why the options considered looked at renovation plus addition, or consolidation, in order to provide more space. This allows for student growth, as well as additional classrooms to account for various programs - so maybe our special education students don't have to receive services

in a closet. By simply renovating each school in its existing space, we may satisfy our current needs (although maybe not), but are we really allowing for any future growth? Are we going to be back in the same spot in 5-10 years with brand new schools that still don't meet our needs? That would be a complete failure from the Town if that's where we ended up. We need to think long term. A new school is a 50-75 year investment, so we need to think about that as we make these decisions and not only look at the short-term.

3. What is your position on 3A?

I support the premise of 3A. There is a significant housing shortage in this state. Housing prices are out of control. I know plenty of people that cannot afford to buy a home. I think there needs to be action to increase the housing supply and reduce prices. As for the 3A regulations, I do not think they fit neatly into Hamilton's unique circumstances. As a Select Board member, I supported submitting an Amicus brief in the Milton case questioning the constitutionality of the law, I supported submitting feedback to the state on how to revise the regulations to accommodate for Hamilton's circumstances, I supported filing action to receive financial compensation for Hamilton following the State Auditor's unfunded mandate decision. All the while, we continued to develop a compliant zoning plan in case we were told that we needed to comply. At this point, we have been advised that compliance is mandated and we must meet this compliance by July 14th or face repercussions. Therefore, I believe submitting a 3A compliant zoning plan to the Special Town Meeting in June (the plans should be available for public hearing in the next few weeks) is the best approach.

Holding a vote on 3A from the taxpayer is irresponsible, and arguably, a violation of the oath we swear as select board members. There are impacts on the town whether we adopt a 3A plan or reject it. It should be up to the town to decide which impact they prefer. We have a deadline of July 14th from the state to comply, and the Town should have an opportunity to vote yes or no before that date. Before then, we need to have a realistic conversation about what that impact will be. Some say there will be no development, others say there will be skyrisers, neither is realistically correct. It is unfair to say there will be no development, but also the level of housing allowed under the zoning is not realistic either given the amount of developable land in Hamilton and the constraints on infrastructure. There is language in the regulations to account for infrastructure constraints, which we should utilize. If we adopt 3A, there will certainly be impacts with new development, including water, sewer, traffic, schools, etc. People need to be mindful of that and what the cost impact will look like. I would ask our FinCom to provide its best analysis on this issue. If we reject 3A,

there are impacts too - being out of compliance with state law, loss of grant funding, potential litigation/fines, etc. We essentially eliminate one of our few revenue streams, a challenge for a town that already has such a high tax burden and relies heavily on its resident taxpayers. Since water is a statewide issue, what happens if/when there are state grants to support the regional water crisis and exploring alternatives? We removed ourselves from eligibility and this results in more cost to the taxpayer. Overall, the town should have the opportunity to decide and the Select Board should not unilaterally make that decision for them.