Board of Selectmen

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1. **Tell us about yourself and how your experiences will make you a good candidate for this office.**

I'm currently serving my first term as a Selectman in Norwood, and I have been loving it! There's always something to do and ways to help make things better. I moved to Norwood in 2007 from Ohio with my husband. At my day job I am a Producer for an enterprise level video game studio, and over 18 years I've held roles such as Product Manager, eCommerce Manager, Brand Manager, or Community Manager. I started getting involved with the Norwood community more heavily in 2017 doing volunteer work with groups like the League of Women Voters. That led to me volunteering to serve in Town Meeting and on appointed committees. I then ran for the Board of Selectmen when a seat became available three years ago. I've ramped up quickly and stayed very active on the Board:

- I'm very proud of the healthy relationship I've cultivated with our Fire Fighters, and I was on the successful search panel for our new Fire Chief.
- I'm a founding member of the Norwood Anti-Scam Task Force (NASTF), where I work with other Town staff and our Police Detectives to produce PSAs and other educational materials about how residents can avoid scams, and what to do if you've been scammed, especially assisting Seniors and Youth.
- Speaking of Youth, I serve as the Board's representative to Impact Norwood, which supports Norwood Youth wellness and substance abuse prevention. I'm happy to report we continue to see downward trends on substance abuse, way to go Mustangs!!
- I designed our new Goals & Objectives tracker this year to help the Board better plan and monitor their goals so things don't slip through the cracks as easily.
- I've been eagerly familiarizing myself with our more complex systems like cable negotiations, or how we've historically approached software license planning. We're Light Commissioners so we gotta keep on top of this stuff and always be thinking ahead.
- Selectmen get a lot of complex reports regularly. It's my favorite thing ever. I'm never bored by it, 300 page reports is where I thrive. It lets me absorb a ton of fantastic facts about the Town, like the number of grocery scale tests we run in a month (139), what impact of the loss of Norwood Hospital has been (spoiler alert: it's caused a domino effect that spreads even beyond Norwood), how the Balch was noted as structurally doing really well for its age in a review of the school buildings, or that we have a native species of bat in the Town called the Tricolored bat! No report is too long or dry for me, and in our role the details matter because getting them wrong can open the Town up to liability.
- Recently I've joined the Community Preservation Committee as the Board's representative.
- I'm currently on the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) for Norwood.
- I attend the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA), and when I get to travel I like to explore Municipal strategies in cities and towns that I visit around the Country and Globally (I was so jealous of Berlin's low plastics strategies by the way).

- I participate in our pilot programs and then share my experiences with residents and the staff for research or educational purposes, such as: converting my home to an air-source heat pump and measuring the change in energy consumption and costs; driving my electric car cross country and documenting that process; participating in the Compost program; and removing impervious surfaces on my property and adding native plants from Norwood seed catalog. I think it's important for Selectmen to try stuff and then share their experiences for the benefit of residents.
- This past year I was elected to the role of Vice Chairman, supporting the Chairman of the Board in planning and organizing the meetings, and running a meeting in the event that the Chair can't attend.

The role of the Selectmen is something that you can invest as many hours into as you're willing, and I love that about it. Limitless opportunities to help. I would be ever so grateful for the opportunity to continue serving the Town for another three years. There's a lot of uncertainty and change happening at the Federal level, so I think it's important to have stability here at the local level, and that's why I felt it was important for me to serve another term so that there would be continuity, and continuation of mentorship and knowledge sharing among the Board members. I know the processes for how the Agendas are put together, the concerns we're tracking on the horizon, and have built good rapport with our First Responders, Congressman, State Representative, and State Senator. You can learn even more about me at my website amandagrow.com

0. **What do you think is the biggest challenge Norwood is facing right now and what would you do to address it?**

Rising costs is a huge concern, because it's happening in areas where we have less direct ability to predict and control. Whether by unexpected tariffs on materials, breakdowns in critical global shipping supply chains, or natural disasters leaving chaos in their wake, all of these things translate into increased costs. Sometimes it's immediate, other times it's insidious.

There are four ways to deal with it. The "four C's": you can cut, you can change, you can counter, or you can create. The first, cutting, is something we're all pretty familiar with, and is often the first strategy used. It's a fine strategy, but it can't be the only one. I want to encourage the Board to also be more assertive about the other three strategies too:
- Change - work with staff to proactively plan out pivots to cheaper alternatives that can still get the job done. Example: I've been helping to surface high quality free alternatives to expensive Software renewals, especially those which are showing steep year over year increases or that we don't have a long term need worth spinning up a license for. I'm currently exploring new types of social media to see if we can leverage it to save time or money on how we do our outreach to residents.
- Counter - use strategies to prevent cost increases from happening in the first place. A great example is increased training of volunteers around "do's and don'ts" so that we avoid rising our insurance costs from lawsuits. I've enjoyed working with staff to improve our new volunteer tutorials. In my next term I'd love to put some focus on "error proofing" around processes to make it harder for a volunteer to inadvertently make a costly mistake, because we structure processes in ways that naturally avoid it.
- Create - this method is my favorite because it requires inventiveness and tenacity. I want us to put intense thought into new ways to bring funds to the town. I'm excited to continue to

grow our lobbying relationships, strengthening connections with County officials in order to gain more funding opportunities. I'm currently exploring new products we could sell at the Light Department, or even ways to grow our audience size there. I want to encourage the "Maker" economy in the community. There are many paths to explore and I'm eager to help. And it goes without saying: we've gotta get Norwood Hospital finished. I'm investigating what we can do at a bylaw level to make sure would-be operators feel confident in starting their operations here, and networking to find professional organizations with experience onboarding such Operators. If I get re-elected, I'll be making field trips to appear before the Boards and Delegations of other impacted communities, so that we can make sure there is continued strong regional public pressure to finish the Norwood Hospital.

I am very proud of the work I've done with the Chair and other Board Members to create a long term goals tracker for the Board (which also doubles as a reusable annual goals tracker, something I was also happy to help restore). By mapping out longer term bigger ideas, then scoping them so we can act on them more effectively, and know in advance when we're thinking about tackling each part, it will allow us to be in a better position to do more than simply cut in response to budget challenges. As an added bonus, it can make the Board's intentions and plans less mysterious for the public and other departments, and can even serve as a handy tool for communicating with our County, State, and Federal delegations. I would love the chance to continue this in a second term! It's not done yet, but my dream is to finish programming a pro bono web tool that correlates our Norwood goals with State and Federal bills that relate to those goals, to make it easier for us to lobby up, but also easier for our Delegation to quickly see what's going on here in Town that is high priority to us. It could be another great way to find funding or avoid costs proactively. I've been chipping away at the design as a personal side project in my (arguably limited) free time, but worst case as long as the design is done I can try to seek out some folks with API and webapp experience who'd be willing to volunteer toward such a tool, or I may be able to pitch the design to the Tech team that I met at the Statehouse. Like I say, there's limitless ways to help!

0.   What do you think should be included in Norwood's Comprehensive Plan?

Ok so the first obvious answer is: input from a really broad range of the community. We have to try lots of different ways to reach many different kinds of people in town, not just the ones who say use social media or read the newspaper. I think we should continue to aggressively recruit volunteers whose passion is thinking up new ways to gather input from the residents for the process.

I'm hoping we include some solid "invisible infrastructure" long term planning. Those things that are easy to take for granted because they're out of sight, out of mind. Things like: tree canopy management for energy consumption control (fun fact: if you lose your tree canopy it can cause a Town's energy costs to rise by 25% due to the loss of natural cooling in the summer and wind-break in the winter). Or what about cell phone "dead spots" around town? What's our long term plan for legally required document storage, do we like the way we're doing it currently, and will it work well as even more time passes and more documents accrue? How will we communicate with residents if there continue to be changes to how residents choose to receive their information compared to past decades? These are things that can creep up and become problems over a decade if we're not thinking about planning for them now.

I really want to see us build in a more robust plan around "sunsetting" Town assets that fall out of use. Historic preservation is not just protecting the things we know we're excited for now (like we all know that we want to protect the Town Hall, or buildings that are currently in private hands like the Theatre or the "Doll House" Mansion). We also need a more proper and formal process for decommissioning Town owned buildings or properties. I was absolutely appalled at how the old Water Treatment plant was left to pasture, creating a situation where it's too far gone for us to make good use of, but also too complex to dismantle, and too much of a safety hazard to let it sit untended returning to nature. If we need to stop utilizing a public facility because it has outlived its original useful purpose, but we're unwilling to sell it either, then we need to better formalize how to best repurpose, preserve, or dismantle the asset.

A specific problem area I'd love to see the Plan address is the disconnected nature of the Route 1 corridor from the community. While we had updated zoning to nudge it in a better direction, I think we need to get more assertive with strategies to address it. From the first day I came to Norwood, Route 1 always felt like some totally different universe, like it wasn't part of Norwood even though it is. It's like you enter Route 1 and the atmosphere changes compared to everywhere else in Town. It's okay for it to be a different aspect of the Town, but it feels so different that it feels ... like if the Town center is nicknamed "Norwood's Livingroom", then Route 1 corridor almost feels like the Town Breezeway? Like yeah, structurally it's technically under the same roof, but it's an area that you just want to pass through to get to something. It's not a place that you want to dwell in or spend time in, not in the same way it feels in the rest of Town, and that hurts the businesses that are trying to thrive there, as well as the adjacent neighbors who would benefit from having some more places to conveniently visit on foot. It's also a major "gateway" into the Town, so that's people's first impression when they come here. I know it was for me; the first road I used to get into Norwood moving here from Ohio was Route 1, not Washington or Neponset. Like I live within maybe 2 blocks of Route 1, but *never* do I feel myself having the urge to take a walk over there. It feels inhospitable, even though there is useful and interesting stuff over there. I'd like to see that change, I'd like Route 1 to feel more like the overall fabric of Norwood the way other areas of Town do, and I think we're going to have to be more involved and that we can't simply sit back and let private businesses do all the lifting on that. The Plan is a really great way to do that.

0. **What is an important issue that you would like the Board of Selectmen to address that they currently are not?**

Norwood's a thriving community, so that means it's easy to think of issues that the Board should address, yet hasn't so far. Many are on our radar, even if we've taken no formal action yet. But one that has been on my mind is liability around a lack of official policy or positions on the staff's use of "Generative Artificial Intelligence" technology for official Town business.

You may have heard of this technology, or even used it yourself in the form of new "friendly AI chat bots" being added to various services we're used to, or seeing an increase in shockingly convincing fully computer generated images and videos. Or hearing about fantastic new discoveries and time savings that researchers make by using Generative AI. Machine Learning advancements went from a niche topic for those of us data science nerds to a product put right into all of our phones and advertised at the Superbowl.

I've started to have policy conversations with the General Manager, but I seem to be the only one having them (okay, maybe not THE only. Shout out to the Library who has been investigating the topic as well, and with whom I meet with on the topic periodically, as well as the Anti-Scam task force, who meets regularly with me to stay aware of how this technology could be abused). It's a new frontier that has rapidly grown. I'm very worried that people don't understand the legal risks, yet Generative AI tools are suddenly ubiquitous in everything from search engines to banking.

There's a ton of unanswered policy questions. It's one thing to have the technology helping a scientist in a laboratory. It's much different to have Town staff use it for responding to residents, writing reports, or making decisions. The legal landscape around such technology is rapidly shifting. Here's some examples of open questions based on various legal precedents and court cases working their way through the systems as I speak. Bare with me because these are going to be very technical sounding questions, but that's my point, we need to know about these things because people are now being casually exposed to it in their phones and computers without much formal training:

- If a Town Employee uses Generative AI to create an image for a community flier, does that open the Town up to any legal liability if the AI model's training data is found to have sourced training images without proper permission?
- Are we at risk of discrimination suits if we use a Generative AI model found to have biased outputs on the basis of things like age, race, or religion?
- Are we as a Board comfortable with staff like the Economic Development team using proprietary AI models to generate reports and analysis for us?
- If a vendor or contractor uses Generative AI to perform work for us, but doesn't disclose that fact to us (or the AI that they use is proprietary so we can't inspect how it makes its decisions or which data it was trained on), are we comfortable with that?
- Courts routinely hold up the doctrine "no human, no copyright", and several rulings have been made similarly around things created using Generative AI. So would that inadvertently give up any of the Town's typical rights for materials the Town creates if we used Generative AI to create it, which in the past would never have been in question?
- Are there any competitive business threats that Generative AI poses to our services at the Light Department, such as AI driven features the public will expect that we're not providing?

We can't throw up our hands and go "oh I dunno, the tech people will figure it out". Imagine if we took that attitude toward other important areas of life like public safety? I'm not a Fire Fighter, but as a Selectman I still have a responsibility to review reports from the Fire Department, to learn about important issues in Fire service (like PFAS, or the impact to service runs from the absence of the Hospital), and to be involved in important decisions relating to our ability to provide those services. As the Executive branch of the Town, we have a responsibility to protect the Town's interests and residents, no matter what new high tech shape that takes. We can't be complacent. We've gotta be brave and keep learning about this ever changing world, even when it's hard, or it will change out from under us and we'll be caught off guard.