

THE BEDFORD CITIZEN

Submitted by Sandra Hackman, Caucus Nominee and incumbent candidate for Planning Board



Sandra Hackman

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TWO BEDFORD CITIZEN QUESTIONS FOR PLANNING BOARD CANDIDATES

Q1: Give an example of a situation in which you played a role in helping people of different opinions or perspective develop a mutually agreeable solution to a problem. This could be an example from work, volunteer commitments or a previous experience in a public role. How was this accomplished? What did you learn?

Five years ago I arrived at my mother's house near Philadelphia and found her almost catatonic. I had seen early signs of dementia during the previous two years, but my four siblings were in denial.

I had to convince my active and independent mother to move to a safer place. I told her I would not leave until she had visited two retirement communities, so she agreed. I talked to her at length about why moving was important and laid out the options. She resisted every step of the way but somehow knew I was on her side. After finding numerous unpaid bills, I enlisted her lawyer to help convince her to let me take control of her finances.

My siblings were stunned: what was the rush? Meanwhile, from Bedford, I enlisted numerous consultants to prepare her home for sale and put it on the market. My siblings were shocked when the agents priced the home much lower than what they thought it was worth. Despite some angry conversations, I did my best to show them why the move was essential, and how we could pull it off. Risky? Yes. My family connections were at stake.

Everyone ended up helping in the monumental effort. And the consultants told me the move came not a moment too soon: my mother was quickly losing capacity. That became apparent in

her new apartment, where she soon broke a hip and then had a stroke. If we hadn't moved her when we did, we would have faced a disaster.

Today we are all very close. I learned to trust my instincts. I also learned that even though they are often accurate, I need to listen more carefully to people's concerns and take their suggestions into account. I learned that disagreements can fade with time.

Q2: Which elements of the Comprehensive Plan do you see as the most challenging for Bedford?

Bedford is 95 percent built out, and its industrial and retail businesses are aging. The plan therefore sees the next 20 years as an era of redevelopment. To spur that redevelopment and strengthen the town's tax base, Bedford needs to update its zoning bylaws, to give developers and business owners new incentives to invest. However, such reinvestment will bring worsening traffic—already residents' major complaint. That means everyone in Bedford will have to work together to create—and use—alternatives to travel by automobile.

That work has already begun. The Middlesex 3 Coalition has launched shuttles from Boston and Cambridge to area businesses, to enable employees who prefer urban living—as many younger professionals now do—to get to work. The coalition just received a major state grant to create a transportation management association, to further develop these options. Meanwhile many town committees and other volunteers are working hard to expand biking, sidewalk, and trail networks.

We need to analyze traffic on the Great Rd. and coordinate local and regional bus service with other towns. And we need to implement the Great Road Master Plan—and extend it to the rest of that route—to foster a central corridor that is vibrant, attractive, and welcoming.

We need to continue to strengthen Depot Park as a second town center that accommodates the needs and desires of both residents and businesses. And we need to provide more options for seniors who want to downsize but stay in Bedford.

All this will require creative work—as well as compromise—by stakeholders from every sector. The result will be an even stronger community that a diverse range of residents can afford and want to live in. Our community will also be healthier, as people have more opportunities to walk, bike, play, and interact.

SANDRA'S CAUCUS STATEMENT

[Please note: I did not prepare a speech for the caucus because I did not expect to run, so my remarks were relatively brief. These are slightly modified from a video of the caucus.]

I am not used to speaking extemporaneously. To be honest, my decision to run for a fifth term on the Planning Board happened only tonight.

That said, I can attest that this is a very exciting time for the Planning Board and for Bedford, and I'm very glad to be running. I don't know if you've had a chance to read the new Comprehensive Plan—if you haven't, I hope you will. In that document, we are calling this an era of redevelopment for Bedford.

Many areas of the town need redevelopment, and the Comprehensive Plan has lots of ideas for how to do so. At the same time, people in the town have come together around the desire to create a tighter community built around more opportunities for walking and biking, and other transportation options. I want to work on those options.

I have been doing some work on local and regional transportation and other concerns as Bedford's representative on the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and also as the Planning Board representative to MAGIC, the MAPC subregion of which Bedford is a member. I have also been attending Healthy Bedford meetings, which is beginning to focus on transportation challenges.

Both the town and the Planning Board have a huge amount of work to do to implement the Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Board, especially, has put off revising key zoning bylaws as we worked for two and a half years to craft the new plan. Fortunately, we also hired a great Planning Director two and a half years ago—he's considered one of the best in the state. The Assistant Planner is equally gifted. And Cathy Silvestrone, the administrative assistant, is fabulous. So we have a great staff and a great board—I love my colleagues. They are all very thoughtful.

I very much appreciate the input of all the members of the ad hoc committee and other residents who came to so many meetings on the Comprehensive Plan. Their work really paid off.

I think we can look forward to an exciting next few years in Bedford. I hope you will consider voting for me for as a caucus nominee, and in the election in March. Thank you.