

THE BEDFORD CITIZEN

Submitted by Mike Rosenberg, Caucus Nominee and incumbent candidate for Selectman



Mike Rosenberg

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TWO BEDFORD CITIZEN QUESTIONS FOR THE SELECTMEN 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?

I've always considered myself a conciliator. Local government is most effective when all stakeholders feel they have been sincerely heard. That is true at the board and committee level and across the breadth of the population.

Although Bedford has been well-managed for a generation and has avoided the polarization that plagues government at all levels, there are always differences of opinion. As an elected official, it is my responsibility to be sensitive to perspectives that may not agree with mine and try to influence outcomes that are acceptable to the most people, without compromising integrity or principle.

I like to think of my role in the realization of the synthetic turf project as an example of a patient effort to process a range of feelings and chart a course that ultimately enhanced local quality of life. This process extended over several years and involved two different groups: advocates, who advanced a variety of priorities; and opponents, who still merited an audience despite our disagreement.

The initial proposal fell short of the three selectmen's votes needed to get onto the warrant. A year later, anticipating that possibility, I suggested that supporters petition the article. Although the selectmen supported the proposal, it fell short of the two-thirds town meeting vote required for the bond. That led to my motion to establish an ad hoc committee, a real all-star team that examined every angle and ultimately was successful. At a special town meeting, I like to think I was instrumental in presenting the article without disparaging others' points of view.

A few days before the vote, I contacted several opponents of the field, explaining how their concerns were being addressed. I don't know if I changed any minds, but I felt like that effort was consistent with my commitment to resolving differences.

Q2 Last year the Town faced a particular situation regarding homeless families sheltered at the Bedford Plaza. Various public meetings were held. In the future, how can the Town prepare itself to go forward with respect to unanticipated issues requiring fairly immediate town-wide information sharing?

I really don't think this is a problem. Most unanticipated issues requiring immediate information sharing are public works or safety emergencies. Town government is equipped to inform residents of "breaking news," from automated calls and the radio station to email and social media. Elected officials and department heads are accessible and transparent (I've publicized personal contact information since I joined the School Committee in 1999).

There are always issues in local government that have the potential to agitate, and comprehensive information is the best way to ensure responsible dialogue. In the 1960s, '70s and '80s, the weekly newspaper approached 90 percent penetration of all households, and those of us who did the writing felt we were caretakers of a public trust. The Bedford Citizen sustains that tradition with comprehensive coverage, but its circulation is significantly lower, and commercial media have much less of an impact.

That being said, I don't think these are "unanticipated issues." When I was in the School Committee, there were occasional topics that engendered large, animated reactions. Most were related to potential budget cuts that threatened popular programming. There also was a middle school flag controversy. These situations developed and intensified, and a response was anticipated.

The particular situation with homeless families at the Bedford Plaza was magnificently defused by our state representative, Ken Gordon. Again, it was evolutionary, with families entering the hotel as early as three years ago. In retrospect, I feel I was too much of a spectator as the number of families increased. I know my reluctance was based on concern about any negative impact on the residents. Ken was able to achieve relief without harming their interests. There were moments when some public feelings were intense, and I learned that sometimes a more aggressive early approach can redirect a potential crisis.

MIKE ROSENBERG'S CAUCUS STATEMENT

As someone who grew up in New England, I have always been a big fan of municipal government – the grass-roots level where an individual citizen can influence changes to her quality of life. Selectmen are emblematic of that role, and as a reporter in Bedford almost 40 years ago they were larger than life. After all, besides military heroes, who else do we name streets after in this town? Selectmen – like Ellingson, Genetti, Goldman, Hume. (Oh yes, and town counsel....Dick Donovan Drive, Francis Kelly Road.)

Anyway, after six years on what used to be called a board, I'm not looking for permanent recognition on a street sign. But I am asking for your vote because I still am passionate about the relevance and rewards of local government. I want to share a few of the perspectives I have gained, which outline some of the priorities anticipated for a third term:

- Bedford is in danger of becoming a gated community without the gates. This is not policy driven; it's simply the market at work. Yet demographic diversity always has been central to what people regard as the Bedford way, and that's why I always will be an advocate for ensuring a supply of housing that is affordable.
- There is something to this regional communication that my predecessor Gordon Feltman tried to teach me. We can share expertise and experience and brainstorm, and this has especially become evident as the four contiguous towns discuss and consider the future of Hanscom Air Force Base and the development of Hansom Field. The experience I have gained over six years on the HATS Committee has been invaluable.
- Also hard to measure is the value of serving three terms on the school committee before I was elected selectman. It has provided me with a unique perspective and empathy -- not just as a lesson in intergovernmental relations but also by recognizing the importance of young people as they charge through the grades and emerge into citizenship. How can we inspire them to appreciate and invest time and energy in government at the grass roots? It is gratifying for me to work alongside people like Stacey Swider and Caroline Fedele and School Committee member Mike McAllister, all BHS alumni whom I knew as kids.
- As a longtime newspaper editor and columnist before holding elective office, I learned about the myriad components of our community – the individual residents and their interests and skills, the clubs and organizations. There is a constant interaction between government and the individual citizen, the neighborhoods, the groups. I feel I am uniquely equipped to interact this way.

One reason town government works so well here is the excellence of its professional management. Our town manager and department heads, not to mention the office of the superintendent of schools, are not just capable administrators. They are superb leaders and planners, occasionally visionaries.

It has been a privilege for me to hold elective office for the past 14 years, and to have lived in this wonderful community for the past 40. Thanks so much for your past support; I would be so grateful if it could continue on March 8.