



2021
TOWN
ELECTION



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PLANNING BOARD

CHRISTOPHER GITTINS

INITIAL STATEMENT

My name is Chris Gittins. I am asking for your vote for a seat on the Planning Board. As a member of the Conservation Commission and previous member of the Arbor Resources Committee, I understand how facts, opinions, and the law must be harmonized in order to make good decisions. As a member of Planning Board, I would like to build on the good work that it's done over the years.

I've been a Bedford resident for twenty years but my memories of town date back to the 1970's when my parents and I would drive in from central MA to visit with my grandparents. I am fortunate to live here in their former home, now with my wife and two children, who are both in the Bedford school system. I've seen the dramatic transformation Bedford has undergone over the decades and know that we must be pro-active in our long-term planning so that we're not continually reacting to the world after it has changed around us.

As a member of the Planning Board my priorities will include:

- **Housing:** Expand housing options for all ages and socio-economic groups,
- **Mobility:** Make it easier and more appealing to walk and bike around town,
- **Local business:** Support policy and infrastructure which helps local businesses succeed,
- **Climate resiliency:** Incorporating climate resiliency in new construction.

I'll elaborate on each of those priorities:

Expanding housing options

The median home price in Bedford has risen substantially faster than inflation for many years. Our stock of middle-income-affordable homes is shrinking as homes built in the middle of last century are torn down and replaced with houses 2-3 times the size. While teardowns are unavoidable, through selective changes to our zoning bylaws, we can promote housing options for people who are finding it harder to afford living here, in

particular, young people, families looking for a starter home, and seniors. Toward that end, I support bylaw changes which will make it easier for homeowners to build Accessory Dwelling Units. Through the judicious use of Overlay Districts and other zoning tools, we can encourage the construction of new housing like senior-oriented apartments and assisted living facilities – that is respectful of current neighborhood character.

Making it easier and more appealing to walk and bike around town

Good connectivity between neighborhoods and between Bedford and surrounding towns strengthens our community and improves our quality of life. It's good to see more people out walking and biking over the past year and I'd like to encourage the implementation of infrastructure recommendations from Bedford's Bike-Pedestrian Master Plan to make it easier and more appealing to bike and walk around town. I will do all I can to ensure that new commercial and retail construction is easily accessible by foot or bicycle, not just by car. When we can bike or walk to destinations it not only reduces local traffic but we're less inconvenienced by whatever traffic there is.

Supporting policy and infrastructure which helps local businesses succeed

Bedford is a great place to live in part because we have a vital commercial and retail sector. This ensures that we have a diverse property tax base and creates opportunities to work in town as well as to live here. We can support local business by making our commercial areas more amenable to walk-in customers. We can ensure that zoning allows retail and commercial space is sized to meet the needs of local businesses.

Many commercial properties were built decades ago and aren't well-matched to the current and future needs of growth industries in eastern MA, like biotechnology. I will support redevelopment of vacant and underutilized commercial properties as necessary to attract growing industries.

Incorporating climate resiliency in new construction

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, building resiliency to climate change, and improving energy efficiency are core issues for me. These concerns are not solely environmental, but critical to sensible fiscal management in the coming years as well. Local planning should be integrated with state-level climate-related initiatives. For example, EV charging infrastructure needs to be built out to meet increasing demand; working for more carbon-neutral ("net-zero") improvements in buildings and infrastructure will reduce long-term costs and build our resilience to climate change. The Planning Board should encourage net-zero construction in new developments and work with developers to minimize barriers to implementation.

In conclusion, I am deeply committed to addressing Bedford's current and long-term planning challenges. Bedford residents have a tremendous amount of creativity, goodwill,

and ability to solve tough problems. I would welcome the opportunity to serve on the Planning Board to achieve our vision for Bedford's future together. Thank you for your consideration. I ask for your vote in-person on March 13 or by mail if you've requested a mail-in ballot.

QUESTIONS ~ LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

Traffic congestion is often cited by candidates as an issue they would address if elected. What ideas would you bring to the table and how would you work with the Select Board to implement changes to address this issue?

Reducing traffic congestion requires reducing the number of single-occupancy vehicle trips people take. Better public transportation to reduce passthrough traffic would be most effective but that requires state-level action. Here are three things we can do locally:

- *Allow more housing to be built near retail areas so more people can walk from where they live to where they shop and eat out,*
- *Support construction of amenities near where people work so they can walk to them,*
- *Require Transportation Demand Management plans of new business development to encourage use of public transportation, ridesharing, walking and biking to work.*

How would you work toward greater housing equity, i.e., assuring that Bedford offers opportunities that will attract residents of all ages and socio-economic status?

Bedford is 'built out'. We no longer have undeveloped half-acre lots where people can build moderately-priced single-family homes like they did in the mid-20th century. We need to adapt accordingly. Expanding housing options will require accepting modest increases in housing density, e.g., lowering the barriers to constructing Accessory Dwelling Units in appropriate areas so homeowners can downsize on their own property or rent to folks saving for their first home. Mixed-use zoning helps too – allow apartments in some primarily-commercial areas, see, e.g., Blake Block. Mixed-use could also work in the vicinity of Stop & Shop in the future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- [Tom Larkin](#)