

Sustainable Milton invited candidates for Select Board to share their views on sustainability and environmental issues by answering two questions. Read Richard's response here:

Question 1: What do you see as the most important sustainable issues facing Milton today and if elected, what would your role be to address them?

Since I am in my sixth year on the Milton Selectboard, I think I might begin with some of our gains as well as challenges. My work in Milton on this issue dates to my time as Police Chief which began in 2007 and ended in August of 2016. During this time, with the help of Consolidated Facilities Director Bill Ritchie, we secured many dollars in grants to reduce the heating demands of Police Headquarters and improve our electrical dependence. This effort involved upgrading all windows, adding new insulation into the building, while also engaging Mass Save to advance all electrical lighting. Also, in 2011 I began the historical effort to replace all large 8-cylinder administrative vehicles with 4-cylinder compact vehicles. Today, the Town is fortunate that the next generation of administrative fleet vehicles has transitioned to hybrid and electrical vehicles.

In my time on the Selectboard, I strongly advocated that the Town Administrator undertake the purchase and installation of electric charging stations for Milton. While the Town has had success, this endeavor must expand to the entire Town, (East Milton Business district), our Schools, and other Town Buildings. In addition, in 2019, the Town began to move to an administrative EV Fleet, an initiative that I strongly encourage moving forward. In addition to vehicles, Milton is currently in the process of building (3) new Fire Stations. As the Liaison to the FS Building Committee, I have advocated that these new buildings be as "green as possible." I am not alone in this mindset. The Committee Chair, Chief and all members support this. The same is true of our Animal shelter Committee. The new shelter will be all electric with solar.

Milton must also work hard to reduce the thousands of cars that commute daily through our streets. Our Town also must protect our natural resources from the impacts of climate change, (Blue Hills, Neponset River, our parks and open spaces). Finally, our early financial success of community recycling has diminished greatly. We must collaborate with our regional neighbors to find methods which make community recycling more sustainable and less costly. These are just a few of the successes and challenges for Milton.

Question 2: What role do you see for Milton's town government in responding to climate change?

If re-elected, there is a lot of work to do. Everything from lowering the towns dependency on gas vehicles, as well as creating incentives for new construction of green homes and solar power. Another important endeavor involves a strong commitment by residents to annually replace fallen trees as well as aggressively planting new trees. Personally, I am proud to be a member of a local Foundation that donated \$50,000 to this initiative for Milton 360 last year. For many in Town, they don't realize how important this work is to the overall quality of life and health of Milton, specifically how this work affects the negative pressures from climate change.

While I could probably fill many pages on this topic, I will elaborate on one very important undertaking for Milton. Our town is lucky to be graced by the beautiful Neponset River. From the Saltwater estuary and marshes that transverse the river from the opening from Boston Harbor in Port Norfolk and Quincy, all the way to the Baker Dam in Milton Lower Mills. Upstream of the Baker Chocolate Dam, the freshwater side of the Neponset quietly and serenely cuts a path along the Central Ave corridor along Eliot St, into the Columbinas under the Parkway all the way to Dedham. Decades of pollution from dye factories and transformer factories have filled this beautiful natural gem with toxins threatening our community, wildlife and more. Recently the Federal EPA has designated the freshwater side from the Baker Dam to Dedham as a multimillion-dollar superfund cleanup project. Since 2017 I have chaired the Milton Selectboard Neponset River/Milton Landing Committee. The three-mile Saltwater side of this river is beyond majestic. The river today in Milton is home to recreational boating, kayaking, canoeing, competitive and recreational crew, fishing, biking, walking and birdwatching. Along the banks, you will find, ducks, geese, hawks, osprey and Milton's newest inhabitants the great American Bald Eagle. This area of the Neponset has been identified as the largest native spawning location for the Atlantic Smelt. The annual migration of these protected fish is one of the reasons it is so rich with wildlife. This 2.5-mile area of Milton with Boston bordering the north side of the river, is a critically important and endangered environmental worry for our community.

In 2021 given the alarming news of the pollution on the freshwater side of the Neponset, combined with a recent marine study from Save the Harbor Inc on sea level rise, we engaged our neighbors in Boston and Quincy to study this issue. Our work secured a \$50,000 grant to test for potential hazards including pollution and sea level rise from climate change. The bad news is that the toxins that have washed into this ACEC (Area of Critical Environmental Concern) are significant. Enough to potentially threaten the life and existence of this beautiful gem of nature. In addition, our group is working closely with Save the Harbor who are spearheading the threat of sea level rise for Boston Harbor and all its rivers and bays. The reality, if ignored, is substantial. If left unaddressed, the area of Milton known as Milton Village, Lower Mills and the entire ACEC including the borders neighboring the Neponset could face a serious future threat. We are working diligently on this important environmental problem and will not stop until it is resolved.

In my nearly four decades of service to Milton, the one description that I have always used when looking at the overall makeup of our Town is "special." While Milton faces many challenges to the qualities that make our home special, the pressures of pollution, climate change, and the overall health of Milton sit right up there with our annual budgetary pressures, town services and education. The job of protecting this special Town belongs to all of us. I hope to be fortunate enough to continue fighting for Milton, its natural beauty and wonderful quality of life its citizens expect.

Thank you,
Richard G. Wells Jr.
Secretary, Milton Selectboard

