

DEBRA WALLER

Candidate for Ward 5 City Councilor

September 14, 2021: Newsletter #1

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www.WallerForNewton.org

Announcement of Ward 5 Candidacy and Request for Support

Dear Neighbor,

I am running for the office of Ward 5 City Councilor in the November 2nd election. Only Ward 5 residents may vote for this office but, if elected, my voice will count the same as the other council members. To learn about my positions, and to donate or volunteer, please go to www.WallerForNewton.org or email me at Debra@WallerforNewton.org.

If you are a Ward 5 resident, please also consider hosting a “meet and greet” event for me and/or displaying a yard sign in Ward 5. Yard signs will only be displayed from September 18 until a few days past election day and are a great way of generating interest in the election. If you would like a yard sign, the campaign will deliver, set-up, and remove one, with no effort on your part. Please email me to set up an event or obtain a yard sign.

As the Ward 5 representative on the City Council, I would create a process of open and honest engagement for Newton residents. Three priorities are essential in achieving this.

Priority 1: I Will Support Rezoning Objectives that Residents Understand and Want

Since October 2018, the City Council has been considering a radical and severe rezoning of the entire city that makes almost all single/two-family homes nonconforming - thus requiring many more special permits for residential building. The rezoning would then change the highly subjective Special Permit Granting Authority from the City Council to mayor-appointed boards.

This means that small home remodeling projects that currently would be built “by right” with a simple building permit could now require a special permit that could be denied by the mayor-appointed boards - under the proposed rezoning. Conversely, oversized projects that would currently be denied a special permit by the City Council could then be granted a special permit by the mayor-appointed boards - under the proposed rezoning. The denial of a permit for a small project can be followed by the approval of a permit for an oversized project - on the same property. This sets up a chaotic and easily abused permitting system where developers can first buy “unbuildable” properties that then become “buildable” in the subjective and changing judgement of the mayor-appointed boards.

The rezoning has also contained intermittent proposals to eliminate single-family-only zones. These proposals were first introduced in the August 2020 and then removed for most districts in February 2021, right before the March 2021 City Council special election. These proposals will almost certainly be reintroduced and voted on by the City Council that is elected in November 2021.

I will support common sense zoning changes that discourage teardowns and encourage a range of housing prices. You can read about the severity of the proposed rezoning and my specific proposed zoning changes on my [Rezoning Webpage](#).

Priority 2: I Will Depoliticize the Police

My opponent is a "Defund the Police" supporter. I believe instead that we can bring improvements to policing without denigrating our police department. For example, we should adopt improved policies in the crucial area of record-keeping - including the use of body cameras in "use of force" situations. You can read about my specific proposed policing changes on my [Police Reform Webpage](#).

Priority 3: I Will Strengthen Public Process Integrity

Public process integrity is essential to ensure that unseen private interests are not the guiding force in governance. Public process integrity in Newton must be improved with:

-- **Better Record Keeping:** The public records kept by the Newton government are inadequate: Resident supplied records are sometimes deleted; meeting records often don't match recordings of meetings; notices of public hearings don't always describe the legislation/permit/ZBA decision to be voted on. This needs to change.

-- **City Council Legal Staff:** Because the Mayor and City Council often have different goals, the City Council should not be relying on the Mayor's City Solicitor staff for its legal guidance. The City Council needs its own legal staff.

-- **Effective City Council Committee Meetings:** Committee meetings have become places where councilors are often made aware of proposal details for the very first time through lengthy presentations. This format does not allow for pre-meeting resident feedback or adequate meeting time for councilor discussion.

Reasons to Vote for Me

As a City Councilor, I pledge to inform and be informed by residents as directly as possible. My career in mechanical engineering and in financial market risk management has given me an understanding of the quantitative trade-offs in problems and their proposed solutions. It has also given me the ability to acquire and present data in an accessible manner such that everyone can understand these trade-offs for themselves. For more information, please visit my website www.WallerForNewton.org.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and, if you live in Ward 5, I hope that you will consider voting for me as your Ward 5 City Councilor.

Debra Waller