

Precinct 7 Town Meeting Candidates

Eight to be elected for 3 years, nine on the ballot

If no candidate profile is shown, the candidate did not submit a profile.

(* indicates incumbent)

Thomas Hopcroft

tom@tomhopcroft.com

Community Activities

Vice Chair, Winchester School Committee; Member, Friends of Winter Pond

Candidate Statement

What Winchester issues do you think are most important?

I think it is important that Winchester takes stock and seeks to preserve the rich legacy of our community while welcoming new people and ideas that challenge us to grow and lead as one of the Commonwealth's most desirable suburban communities. Towards this end, I believe we need to invest wisely in education, balance traffic with pedestrian (and bicycle) safety, and govern our town operations in a sustainable and fiscally responsible manner.

Of those important issues, which one do you feel most passionate about, and what is your position on that issue?

The tradition of educational excellence in Winchester drives the economic value and vibrancy of our community. I have supported sustainable and fiscally responsible investments in the Winchester Public Schools through my taxes, voting for the Lynch override, and taking a leadership role on the School Committee. Education tops my list as it is core to our identity, and it broadly benefits our community. Increasing traffic volume and velocity, however, must also be addressed as the community is becoming less safe for our children and seniors alike. Finally, we must operate our town in a sustainable and fiscally responsible manner to maintain a healthy and vibrant community.

What does Winchester do well and what might be improved?

Two areas where Winchester is very strong are education (including meeting the needs of our special education students) and athletics. Two areas that could use improvement are town-wide planning (ie, comprehensive plan to address the traffic/safety issues) and communications (ie, we need to do better at communicating all the good work being done in town and provide residents and elected leaders greater transparency for decision making).

The Town Meeting Communications Study Committee has recommended that a written communications plan be prepared and a town communications manager be appointed by FY2025 (https://www.winchester.us/DocumentCenter/View/9219/Communications-Study-Committee_Final-Report_Recommendations). Do you support both recommendations, even if they would involve adding a new full-time position (salary and benefits) to the town budget? If not, what alternative ideas do you suggest?

I support the creation of a written communications plan. I'd like to see whether the plan, once completed, recommends hiring a communications manager and, given finite resources, I'd like to understand what other needs and priorities we have before supporting this position over another possibly more urgent/important role. I am open to hiring a communications manager but need to understand the scope of the work and weigh it against other potential investments.

Lauren L'Esperance*

Isobel Magee

isobelmagee@gmail.com

Community Activities

Originally from the UK, I graduated from Oxford University and worked briefly as an attorney before emigrating to the US with my American husband Tom in 1997. In 2011 we moved our middle school-aged children from Mystic CT to Winchester. I am a proud US citizen and owner of two micro-businesses in Winchester: Scones by Isobel and Upstairs Downstairs Declutter & Organize. I enjoy using my businesses to support local school and community groups, and since 2020 have raised over \$30,000 via scones fundraisers for Woburn Council of Social Concern's Food Pantry and for World Central Kitchen's relief work in Ukraine. I am a passionate mental health advocate and am a facilitator for the Winchester NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Caregiver Support Group.

Candidate Statement

What Winchester issues do you think are most important?

I believe that a community thrives when residents are informed, engaged and active. After living in Winchester for 12 years I now have the time to give back to the community by serving on Town Meeting. I am interested in contributing to progress in three main areas: mental health support for youth and families, support for local businesses and community communication and engagement.

Of those important issues, which one do you feel most passionate about, and what is your position on that issue?

Of these three issues, I would prioritize community communication and engagement as the cornerstone of a vibrant, cohesive and productive community.

The Town Meeting Communications Study Committee has recommended that a written communications plan be prepared and a town communications manager be appointed by FY2025. Do you support both recommendations, even if they would involve adding a new full-time position (salary and benefits) to the town budget? If not, what alternative ideas do you suggest?

I support the development of a written town communications plan and measures to ensure its implementation, including adding a salaried position to the town budget if no other reasonable options are available.

Leigh Hurd*

Stephen Campbell*

scampbell@mitimco.mit.edu

Community Activities

Housing Partnership Board member

Town meeting member

Original EFPBC member

Candidate Statement

What Winchester issues do you think are most important?

Looming financial impacts on the towns budget. Concern that Moodys will negatively impact the Towns debt rating. Lack of affordable housing supply in town.

Of those important issues, which one do you feel most passionate about, and what is your position on that issue?

I am most passionate about the issue of affordable housing in Winchester. I joined the Housing Partnership board to make a difference in bringing affordable housing to Winchester. I believe that diversity of all kinds increases the attractiveness of the town both now and in the future.

What does Winchester do well and what might be improved?

Winchester has a wealth of human capital that is committed to giving back to the town. The caliber of folks who give freely of their time managing the affairs of the town is humbling.

Effective communication is important to ensuring all sides of issues are freely disseminated at the precinct and town wide level.

The Town Meeting Communications Study Committee has recommended that a written communications plan be prepared and a town communications manager be appointed by FY2025. Do you support both recommendations, even if they would involve adding a new full-time position (salary and benefits) to the town budget? If not, what alternative ideas do you suggest?

Yes I support the recommendations of the Communications study Committee.

Jean Jones*

jeansharonjones@verizon.net

Community Activities

Town committee member for 3 years

Volunteer at McCall Middle School and Winchester High School

Member of New England Women in Energy and the Environment (NEWIEE)

Candidate Statement

I am thankful to have served as a Winchester Town Meeting member for precinct 7 these past three years. The experience has given me a deeper perspective on the town and the issues and challenges we face. I'm encouraged by how members respectfully engage in the democratic process and come together to make informed choices for the betterment of our town. Given this experience, I'm excited and energized to run for re-election.

In speaking with members of Precinct 7, the main issues I hear about are our town's long-term planning and sustainability, being fiscally responsible, ensuring that residents are not driven out of town due to increasing overrides, and also ensuring the quality of our school system.

Of those important issues, which one do you feel most passionate about, and what is your position on that issue?

I'm very passionate about making smart choices when spending the town's precious tax dollars and also ensuring we maintain the quality of our schools.

What does Winchester do well and what might be improved?

Winchester is very strong in education, and we need to continue to focus on our schools, which are an important reason that attracts many to the town. We need to also focus on ensuring we meet the town's planning and sustainability needs, and thoughtfully evaluate and prioritize our needs with an eye on how spending impacts the town in the long term.

The Town Meeting Communications Study Committee has recommended that a written communications plan be prepared and a town communications manager be appointed by FY2025. Do you support both recommendations, even if they would involve adding a new full-time position (salary and benefits) to the town budget? If not, what alternative ideas do you suggest?

The report provides excellent suggestions and learnings, including many that can be implemented immediately. I agree that developing a communications plan is important for the town. To accurately assess a potential new full-time position, I need to better understand the specific budget implications. I think that we should consider as an option leveraging the many talented communications professionals in this town that would be skilled at developing and executing a communications plan. I would recommend first evaluating support from volunteers before approving a potential new full-time position.

Jennifer Haefeli
TMJen@yahoo.com

Community Activities

- Town Meeting Communications Study Committee (CSC) – Precinct 7 representative
- Winchester News Group – group of residents exploring the creation of a local news source
- Friends of Winter Pond - board member
- School Improvement Council, Lynch Elementary School
- Lynch Parent Association, WFEE Liaison
- WPS Student Success and Wellbeing Research Group

Candidate Statement

What Winchester issues do you think are most important?

- **Communication:** Getting information to residents and improving communication among town government groups (committees, boards, town hall, Town Meeting)
- **Housing-related issues:** Affordable housing, real estate development, real estate taxes
- **Taxes and budget:** Exploring ways to expand the commercial tax base and ease the residential tax burden; using limited resources wisely and effectively
- **School quality:** Continuing to support our schools

- **Strategic planning / Identifying priorities:** Identifying town-wide priorities and using them to inform policy and spending decisions

Of those important issues, which one do you feel most passionate about, and what is your position on that issue?

Communication. Communication (or lack thereof) has an impact on every other issue. There is a need to increase public awareness of and engagement in town initiatives. Some ideas I support include hiring a communications manager and creating a Town Meeting Members Association. (Please see the last question for more on this.)

If I can add a second issue, I'm also interested in exploring creative ways to expand the commercial tax base and ease the residential tax burden.

What does Winchester do well and what might be improved?

Winchester strengths:

- Schools
- Strong culture of volunteerism
- Strong sense of town pride
- Access to nature (Winter Pond, the Fells, etc.)

Areas to improve:

- Communication
- Greater variety of businesses
- Broader commercial tax base

The Town Meeting Communications Study Committee has recommended that a written communications plan be prepared and a town communications manager be appointed by FY2025. Do you support both recommendations, even if they would involve adding a new full-time position (salary and benefits) to the town budget? If not, what alternative ideas do you suggest?

I was on the Communications Study Committee, and I support both recommendations with some minor caveats.

- The recommendation as submitted to Town Meeting suggested that the Select Board and town manager prepare a communications plan. While the Select Board and town manager can oversee the effort, I think a communications professional should prepare the communications plan.
- I think having a full-time communications professional would be ideal and help increase public awareness of the many issues the town faces and improve communication among our various boards and committees. However, I also recognize that the town has limited resources and many competing priorities. I would want to review the full financial picture and any potential trade-offs when such a hire is discussed. If a full-time position does not seem optimal for the town at that time, I would support hiring someone in a part-time or contractor role to create a communications plan and improve the town website so that information is easier to access.
- I think it is also important to keep in mind that, as noted in the CSC recommendations, "failure to communicate effectively may cost the town more—in staff, consultant, and board overtime; missed opportunities; additional referenda; legal challenges; erosion of public trust, etc.—than the cost of a communications manager."

In addition, I support the CSC recommendation to establish a Town Meeting Members Association (TMMA) and associated listserv. The TMMA would facilitate dialogue and information exchange among town meeting members and allow residents to submit questions on issues before Town Meeting.

Brian Rowan

brian.p.rowan@gmail.com

Community Activities

- WSC Sandlot Soccer Coach – Girls and Boys
- WYBS Spring, Summer, Fall Baseball Coach

Candidate Statement

I've had the pleasure to live in Winchester for the past 10 years with wife, Beth, raising three children, Liam, Emma & Olivia who currently attend Lynch Elementary and St. Mary's Early Learning Center. Winchester is a compassionate, tight-knit community that is a great place to raise a family with residents who truly care about the well-being of their neighbors. Winchester is a safe, walkable town with a vibrant town center. I love walking my kids to school in the morning and seeing all the other students and their families doing the same. In addition, community events like Town Day, the En-Ka Fair and the weekly Farmer's Market are all wonderful experiences that bring people together and are available for all our residents to enjoy.

The town must continue to execute and improve on its long-term sustainability plan, explore ways to further diversify its tax base, and enhance its direct communication with its residents. It is on this final point that I would strongly support the recommendation for the hiring a Communication Manager for the town. In an age of near-constant information overload through cable news and social media; pro-active, targeted communication from the town is more important than ever. It is critical that our town's residents are well-informed and knowledgeable of all the work our town is doing and of the important decisions that need to be made.

I am particularly passionate about Winchester's quest for a more sustainable future as we work to achieve our town's goal of reducing carbon emissions by 80% by 2050. Programs like WinPower 100 and the new Lynch Net-Zero School are a great start, but Winchester needs to continue to take every opportunity to achieve our sustainability goals. Things as simple as continuing to expand our array of electric car chargers, provide advice to residents on how to electrify their homes, and ensuring we take advantage of federal and state incentives all will help us to ensure Winchester is a great place to live for generations to come.

Please feel free to reach out to me directly at brian.p.rowan@gmail.com with any questions or feedback. I look forward to earning your vote and would welcome the opportunity to represent the constituents of Precinct 7 at Town Meeting.

Megan Blackwell

megan.blackwell.winchester@gmail.com

Community Activities

Member (and former chair) Winchester Finance Committee; volunteer at McCall Middle and Ambrose Elementary Schools

Candidate Statement

What Winchester issues do you think are most important?

- Balancing the Town's budget without requiring yearly overrides that raise residents' taxes
- Improved long-term planning of expenses – for example those related to rapidly rising special education costs, Town capital needs to maintain its assets, plus long-term obligations such as Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB)
- Improving the timing and content provided to Town Meeting Members about Warrant Articles

Of those important issues, which one do you feel most passionate about, and what is your position on that issue?

The Town's finances have been my concern for the past several years, so maintaining a balanced budget is my personal priority. I recommend the following:

- Limiting new positions unless absolutely necessary
- Demanding a multi-year financial plan from our elected boards on how to meet rapidly increasing expenses, such as Special Education and retirement liabilities (i.e., other post-employment benefits or "OPEB")
- Prioritizing the preservation of the Town's AAA bond rating

What does Winchester do well and what might be improved?

Winchester is an amazing place to live. It is a beautiful, safe place and offers a solid primary and secondary education (that my children are enjoying), a great library (that my whole family uses), and a strong community of Town administrators and volunteers.

Winchester can improve its long-term financial planning. If we collectively set priorities and holistically view all ways to increase revenue and decrease expenses, the Town will be in a more financially secure position and would not stand to jeopardize its AAA credit rating.

The Town Meeting Communications Study Committee has recommended that a written communications plan be prepared and a town communications manager be appointed by FY2025. Do you support both recommendations, even if they would involve adding a new full-time position (salary and benefits) to the town budget? If not, what alternative ideas do you suggest?

I do not support these recommendations. The Communications Study did a great job uncovering specific ways to improve communications in Winchester. Now the burden is on the Town Manager and the Select Board to support the objective of improved communications and demand it from Town departments and committees. No additional funding should be required to develop a plan or to hire more staff. If communication is a shared priority, then additional staffing would not be needed, as *existing* staff could be required to summarize relevant items weekly or monthly to be shared with constituents. Also, the Town has residents who are skilled in marketing and communication who could be tapped on a volunteer basis to accomplish the stated goals for a Town Communications Manager.