



2021
TOWN
ELECTION



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PLANNING BOARD

ARMEN MATTHEW ZILDJIAN

FINAL CANDIDATE STATEMENT ~ MARCH 8, 2021

First and foremost, I want to thank the League of Women Voters and Bedford TV for hosting their candidate forum on February 28 for our Town Election on March 13. Voters are so fortunate to have such a group of neighbors dedicated to ensuring their election day decisions are well-informed. If you were not able to watch, I encourage you to watch [here](#).

Over the past few weeks, as I have campaigned for a seat on the Planning Board, it has amazed me to talk to so many individuals across Bedford that share my worries and concerns, but simultaneously hold the same optimism and love for this great town that we call “home.”

Growing up in a working-class family — my Mom was a nurse, and my Dad is a state employee, still is today — I understand the many challenges that families have, especially now more than ever. However, due to my parents’ hard work and dedication, we lived in a community that set me up for success.

Over two decades ago, I graduated from Framingham State College, now University, began a career in the technology sales industry, married my wife Sybil, and we began looking for a community to raise a family in. But as soon as we started, we quickly realized that the towns we grew up in were too expensive for a young couple like ourselves. We were so fortunate to find a community like Bedford when it was still affordable for a newly married couple to come and start a family. We have two children that have gone through the wonderful Bedford school system – currently both attending BHS.

However, as I reflected on my experiences and the ever-so-increasing costs of Bedford, the reality began to set in. The same experience that I had nearly twenty years ago is now impossible for so many young couples who see Bedford’s costs now closer align with the same towns that Sybil and I avoided when we were searching.

With the development rate that Bedford is experiencing, our home is quickly becoming unaffordable for people and families from various demographics and socio-economic backgrounds. We have seniors who want to downsize yet stay in the community that they love. We have working-class families who built this town, like nurses, firefighters, teachers, and other working-class individuals, like my parents, who want to raise families in the best possible environment. And we also have people from other economic classes with little to no access to a community like Bedford.

Many of these issues have led town leaders to propose solutions. Yet, some have led us down a path that would lead us toward a more expensive model, akin to towns like Lexington or Concord. In contrast, other proposals have led us to fast urbanization, reflecting a town of the same ilk as Cambridge or Somerville. Neither outcome is right; we need to continue to preserve the community-oriented, small-town feel that we have grown to love.

The Planning Board needs a balanced, thoughtful approach, a voice that I hope to provide to the board to tackle these challenges effectively. But on so many issues, the Planning Board also needs to listen and engage with a diverse set of underserved and underrepresented communities. I do not have a fixed point of view, I am a listener, and I engage people from different backgrounds. That is the pledge I make to the people of Bedford.

If you have any questions or concerns, I encourage you to check out my website armenforbedford.com. I hope to earn your vote on March 13.

VIDEO PSA LINK, THANKS TO BEDFORD TV

[Click this link to view Armen Zildjian's video PSA on Bedford TV](#)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- [Wendy and Paul Ciaccia](#)
- [Lisa and Damon Harrell](#)
- [Michael McAllister](#)
- [Allan Coady](#)
- [Jameson Andrew Wright](#)
- [Daisy Girifalco](#)

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?

Traffic throughout Bedford, especially on Great Road has been a hot topic since I moved to Bedford in 2002. There have been some projects to help resolve problem areas but it's clear that formidable action must be taken to do more, we owe it to our neighbors to address this

issue. The Planning Board should acknowledge that while it may be beneficial to expand business and housing on Great Road, it may not be feasible with the current constraints of traffic. It does not take a traffic study to know that expanding in already busy areas will worsen issues.

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?

I was fortunate enough to move to Bedford when a middle-class family could afford to live here. Nowadays, that is rarely the case. Increased opportunities for housing is on the forefront of my priority as a member of the Planning Board. However, the conversation surrounding housing equity is often proposed as a dichotomy, benefitting one sub-group over another. We should look to serve all groups equally, regardless if they are a family seeking a community that has quality education for their children, or our senior citizens who wish to downsize, or whatever other situation they may be in.

INITIAL STATEMENT

There is little doubt that the times we are living through are unprecedented and difficult. The challenges that our community has encountered over the past year can feel debilitating, but Bedford has shown time and again that we can come together to work for the good of our neighbors and our community.

Like all communities, the adversity that Bedford faces will not suddenly disappear along with Covid-19; they will linger if we don't face them and work to address them. Some issues our town has been facing are families struggling to find affordable housing, seniors hoping to downsize and remain in their community, and traffic lining up and down the Great Road daily. The Bedford Planning Board has the tall task of facing these challenges and I know we can come together and can find workable solutions for the future of our town.

By observing the Planning Board make difficult decisions over the years I have concluded that it could benefit from a new voice on the Board, one that can further encapsulate our collective future. I believe I can bring that voice.

On my campaign website, I have outlined my experience and qualifications [here](#). What I hope you learn about me, and why I would make a well-versed Planning Board member, is that I am a listener. Your concerns are my concerns, and as a leader, neighbor, father, and husband, I know just how critical listening can be.

My name is Armen Zildjian and I've called Bedford home for the past two decades. Over that period of time the Bedford community has become part of our extended family and my wife Sybil and I wouldn't trade the memories we have made here for anything. Our two children

have enjoyed growing up in this safe and loving community, they attended our fantastic public schools and developed tremendous friendships.

My plan is simple: work to expand inclusive and equitable housing, promote small businesses, and ensure accountability. More specifically the Planning Board must work to address the interests of groups who have been left behind in Bedford: our low-income earners, aging population, and middle-class families. It is sometimes presented that these groups' interests are in conflict with one another, but I don't believe they are. I believe we all have a part in what makes this a great community that we call home.

We owe it to the next generation and the previous generation, our kids and parents, to preserve a town that they can continue to call home. We need careful, responsible leadership that is best conceived through someone who can first listen and then act. Bedford deserves an independent and thoughtful voice to represent their interests in tomorrow's future. Ultimately the future is what the Planning Board provides for the people of Bedford.

I promise that as I represent you and your neighbors on the Planning Board that I will be listening to what you want for our community for both today AND tomorrow. That's the promise I'll make to you.

I look forward to earning your vote between now and March 13th. I encourage you to check out my [website](#) to learn about my candidacy, or email me at Armen@ArmenForBedford.com. Similarly, make sure to share my [Facebook](#) with your friends, family, and neighbors.

May you and your family remain healthy amidst these challenging times.