

The community members of Diverse Holliston would like to express our commitment to supporting strong candidates for town leadership. Diverse Holliston is committed to partnering with civic leaders to create a more equitable, accessible community. While we do not endorse any particular candidates, we would like to facilitate voters in making informed choices around which candidates most closely align with these goals. In preparation for the election on May 24th, we asked all the candidates for town office to answer the following series of questions to help us to better understand their positions on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. We are sharing each response we received below. Happy reading, and please be sure to make your voice heard by voting on May 24th.

1. What are the characteristics of an equitable and accessible community?

2. What policy and practice changes would you propose for Holliston to become an equitable and accessible community?

3. Given the leadership role you are seeking, what is your part in this change?

4. What do you need to learn in order to build your capacity to lead Holliston towards this change?

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Daniel Alfred, Candidate for Finance Committee

What are the characteristics of an equitable and accessible community?

There are many measures of an equitable and accessible community.

One measure is the involvement of the town in providing all residents (including tax payers, citizens, non-citizens) with equal access to mental health care and addiction intervention. Over the past few years, I have been advocating for Holliston to take a holistic approach to support and intervention by forming a working group of town employees and board representatives to develop a plan for addressing the mental health and drug abuse crisis. The plan should provide multitudes of care for every resident, especially those who may not have the insurance, time flexibility, or means to access the support all residents deserve.

Another measure is furthering channels of communication and representation with towns governing boards. Diverse Holliston has been making an incredible effort setting the ground work for this type of communication flow. Becoming a more formal entity will protect Diverse Holliston's seat at these tables.

An equitable and accessible community is also socioeconomically diverse. Holliston needs to provide and protect housing opportunities in our town.

What policy and practice changes would you propose for Holliston to become an equitable and accessible community?

Representation in town government is how we shape a more equitable and accessible community. The current town government boards should be working with Diverse Holliston and other groups geared towards ensuring our town's equity and accessibility when creating or changing policy. This can be achieved by appointing liaisons to Diverse Holliston (and vice versa) or by creating a Human Rights Board that is comprised of representatives elected by Diverse Holliston and community members appointed by the Town Administrator. Either of these approaches provides a mechanism to work towards the goal of equity and inclusion from both within and outside of government.

Given the leadership role you are seeking, what is your part in this change?

As a member of the Finance Committee, I am not part of the policy decision making process. The FinCom can neither initiate spending requests nor create policy for the town other than financial policies. However, I can be an advocate, and use my role in leadership and reach to support equity goals for our community. This includes economic development, mental health support, and new or evolving positions in town that support diversity and equity.

I am dedicated to the economic development of our town. My goal is to foster revenue growth, decreasing the tax burden on residents and making Holliston a more affordable place to live. I have also been a supporter of the Assessors' push for special legislation to help lessen the tax burden on seniors. Holliston residents should be supported and not forced to choose between paying their bills or health care and remaining in their homes.

What do you need to learn in order to build your capacity to lead Holliston towards this change?

I need to hear and communicate the perspectives and experiences of residents most affected by these issues. As a current member of the Finance Committee and dedicated resident invested in our town, I've held coffee hours during the years, generally corresponding to Town Meetings. I am also always available to be contacted to hear the opinions and concerns of anyone in the Holliston community.

I use my position to advocate for changes that help residents utilize the town's resources better. I would also like to understand the needs of our residents who are not citizens and do not have a vote in elections or at Town Meeting, because they deserve representation too.

We have over 10,000 registered voters in town and rarely exceed 250 residents in attendance at Town Meeting. What can we do to make Town Meeting more accessible to people? Recently the Select Board moved the start time of Town Meeting up to 7pm from 7:30pm. The Holliston Community Access Fund (which works with YFS) will be providing free babysitting at this year's Town Meeting. I am intrigued to see how these changes impact attendance. Small changes to accessibility are a positive start, and there is plenty of room for growth. What are ways that residents feel could make it more possible for them to attend town meeting? To ensure equity for Holliston's residents, we need to make Town Meeting as accessible as possible.

Hayley Fetrow, Candidate for Finance Committee

What are the characteristics of an equitable and accessible community?

An equitable and accessible community is one that fosters civic engagement. In Holliston's style of government, each resident should be encouraged to participate in our various boards and committees. The Town Meeting style of government was intended to be a vehicle to engage the masses. By encouraging that personal engagement, individuals will have opportunities to share the experiences that shape and inform their decisions. When done well, this civic engagement is equitable as its open to everyone in Holliston rather than just the select population. Civic engagement increases power sharing among a more diverse group of participants and may achieve a more balanced town dynamic.

What policy and practice changes would you propose for Holliston to become an equitable and accessible community?

For Holliston to continue its growth as an equitable and accessible community, we must be committed to balancing the need to evolve while staying rooted in those positive experiences that make people choose Holliston as their home. As a member of the Finance Committee, I will review the Financial Policies for FY2024 and forward to make certain that those policies enable short term and long-term financial planning. Working with financially vulnerable populations in public housing, I have worked for 15+ years toward identifying those fiscal and social barriers that need to be removed for individuals on fixed incomes and will do the same for the residents of Holliston.

Given the leadership role you are seeking, what is your part in this change?

The most important part I may play in this change is to bring others to the table. I have reached out to residents – those I have personal relationships with and those who I am just meeting – to encourage their participation. As a challenger to Finance Committee, I hope to show other residents who have considered running for office that Holliston is open to new leadership. When I join the Finance Committee, I will continue outreach in a manner that is both inviting and empowering. I hope with Holliston's leadership to schedule community forums that engage residents more than twice-annually. While engaging residents online has brought many public meetings into our Holliston homes, we must provide opportunities for people to gather together.

I am committed to considering gathering locations that are non-traditional and more physically inclusive rather than a seated, auditorium setting.

What do you need to learn in order to build your capacity to lead Holliston towards this change?

Over the last few years, I have steadily become more engaged based on my personal experiences and concerns for how budget and policy decisions may impact my family and others. My presence in these conversations has been singular as they have been specific to me. For me to build capacity and have the ability to be part of leading Holliston toward greater civic engagement, I am working to transition my participation to be encompassing of shared experiences. I am learning to bring my lens from my personal ground-level and up to 10,000 feet. By expanding my view, I hope to participate in greater mutual accountability with other boards' members as well. While there are difficult decisions to be made with each budget cycle, I will work to build trust through our shared responsibility and shared learning.

Ken Szajda, Candidate for Finance Committee

What are the characteristics of an equitable and accessible community?

An equitable and accessible community is one where all people feel equally welcome and comfortable, where all residents are afforded the same opportunity (including town services), and where we recognize and celebrate our differences as equals instead of using them as the basis for discrimination.

What policy and practice changes would you propose for Holliston to become an equitable and accessible community?

Holliston already has many programs that support equity and accessibility, and I'd like to see them expanded and strengthened as our finances allow. Our Youth and Family Services department, our schools, and our police department are all seeing impacts from increased demand for mental health services. The town needs to have all three departments work together to develop a holistic approach to best address mental health needs. Our Community Preservation Committee needs to continue to work closely with partner organizations to develop affordable housing; I had the pleasure of working on a habitat for humanity home in town and would love to see more projects like that. I would also like to see better state and federal government support for technology access for all; in the world we live in today, technology access is almost as essential as having electricity or clean water. I'm also a firm believer in 'continuous improvement' where the town should always be evaluating the results that come from these programs and should be looking at ways to make them more effective.

Given the leadership role you are seeking, what is your part in this change?

The Finance Committee has a limited but important role in supporting greater equity and accessibility in Holliston—because we are limited to financial oversight and only make

recommendations we can only influence the actions of Town Meeting. Personally, as I consider budget requests and municipal finance questions, equity and accessibility are two of many factors that I use in my decision-making process. Financial oversight isn't just 'find the lowest price,' it's about getting the best value for the residents. To me, value means achieving the best outcome at the lowest cost, and often that 'best outcome' is related to non-financial objectives like improving support for mental health, or supporting tax exemptions for seniors in need, or supporting affordable housing initiatives. My role is to do my best to support these initiatives while working within the town's financial constraints.

What do you need to learn in order to build your capacity to lead Holliston towards this change?

Many years ago I saw an interview with Ray Stata, the founder of Analog Devices, where the interviewer asked him about being successful. His reply was "never stop learning." I have always followed that mantra. When it comes to equity and accessibility it's all about learning and understanding others. In my professional career I have been fortunate to work with people from all sorts of backgrounds, with all sorts of experiences that are different than mine. Each time I meet someone new I am interested in understanding their personal history because it gives me a perspective that I may not have and helps me develop a greater understanding of the challenges that someone may face. From there it's all about using that new knowledge to develop solutions that help address these challenges.

Vince Murphy, Candidate for Finance Committee

*Due to a mix-up with an incorrect email address for Vin (not his fault), he did not receive the questions until just recently. We will add Vince's answers here as soon as they are available.

LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Gwenyth Swain, Candidate for Library Board of Trustees

What are the characteristics of an equitable and accessible community?

I'm answering this question mainly as it relates to the library, since that's the board I serve on. The Holliston Public Library does a good job of being inclusive, equitable, and accessible. I was impressed by what the staff did during the early days of the pandemic to find ways to reach out to community members while staying safe. This included everything from beefing up online offerings on Overdrive and Hoopla to making sure patrons could get materials by curbside pickup or home delivery. I did some of those deliveries as a volunteer and it was great knowing that people who wanted library materials could get them and feel comfortable. Public libraries serve an important role in communities as a third space: not home, not work or school. They welcome all.

What policy and practice changes would you propose for Holliston to become an equitable and accessible community?

In regards to the library, one recent change that has increased equity and access is the decision to stop collecting fines on overdue items. Some time ago the library also stopped asking patrons to specify gender when applying for a card.

Given the leadership role you are seeking, what is your part in this change?

My role as a member of the library board of trustees is to support library staff in creating that very special welcoming and nonjudgmental space that is a library.

What do you need to learn in order to build your capacity to lead Holliston towards this change?

The best thing I can bring to the role of library board member—a role that involves responding to the needs of the public—is the willingness to listen and learn from others and an openness to ideas and perspectives that are new to me.

PLANNING BOARD

Stephen Wang, Candidate for Planning Board

What are the characteristics of an equitable and accessible community?

The characteristics of an equitable and accessible community starts with the composition of the elected leadership (representative demographics) and this is one aspirational motivator for me to volunteer to run for planning board.

What policy and practice changes would you propose for Holliston to become an equitable and accessible community?

This is a tough question as I humbly believe that my experiences does not allow me to comment on individual/specific policy and practices (especially from the perspective of a candidate running for planning board).

Given the leadership role you are seeking, what is your part in this change?

As captioned in the earlier question, I believe that my life experiences (as a visible minority) in both the family demographics and educational/workplace can expand the diversity of the planning board and our overall community of representatives.

What do you need to learn in order to build your capacity to lead Holliston towards this change?

I believe the understanding of the processes from the bottom-up and the carry through (if successful) is a must in order to learn/identify the pitfalls towards real change.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Cynthia Listewnik, Candidate for School Committee

What are the characteristics of an equitable and accessible community?

Some of the characteristics of an equitable and accessible community are where all residents feel welcomed, respected, valued and supported by programs and services in which community members have opportunities to participate in the decision-making process and offer feedback.

What policy and practice changes would you propose for Holliston to become an equitable and accessible community?

Recently, the Holliston Public Schools adopted a new 5-year strategic plan that outlines the district's mission and values highlighting a safe and supportive school culture as essential to improving outcomes for all students. The district has been moving in the right direction by hiring an SEI & Equity Director to examine our current intervention strategies and facilitate meaningful programs for students, educators and families. Research indicates that equity in education is achieved when students have access to the resources they need for academic success and personal well-being. One identified goal in the strategic plan is to engage a consultant to conduct an Equity audit of our educational programs, policies and procedures and make recommendations for the district to consider. This initiative will offer a detailed analysis of our current services, identify challenges and provide recommendations to build upon our foundation.

Given the leadership role you are seeking, what is your part in this change?

There are many steps in the process toward accomplishing this goal, but the school committee's primary function would be to prioritize this initiative during the budget process. Once the school committee has secured funding, the superintendent would seek proposals from vendors to perform the audit. Ultimately, the school committee would review the report and/or plan and seek guidance from the administration and community as to how to best implement the recommendations given financial resources and staffing availability.

What do you need to learn in order to build your capacity to lead Holliston towards this change?

I think it would be helpful for school committee members to participate in some of the professional development opportunities that are offered to our educators. This may allow us to better understand the complexities and challenges of teaching and learning in the current environment especially while facilitating difficult conversations around diversity, equity and inclusion.

Dawn Neborsky, Candidate for School Committee

What are the characteristics of an equitable and accessible community?

An equitable and accessible community is one that consistently strives to be transparent, open to criticism and responsive to the needs of the community. This goal requires robust self reflection, ongoing education and a commitment to listening even when it's challenging. Action is necessary, but not change as window dressing. Holliston needs to evolve to become a more welcoming and inclusive place for people of all races, ethnicities, sexual orientations and gender identities. Better understanding neurodiversity must be part of this work as well.

What policy and practice changes would you propose for Holliston to become an equitable and accessible community?

Specific to the schools, there are three areas to prioritize: culture/climate, curriculum and professional development.

Given the leadership role you are seeking, what is your part in this change?

School Committee is responsible for budget, policy and evaluating/hiring the Superintendent. We are the voice for students and families. We press for transparent and consistent communication. We advocate for funding for our yearly budget and support positions that work for additional grant funding. Within our role in budget, we prioritize needs and advocate to fund initiatives. Amidst a challenging budget year in FY21-22 (due to covid, unresolved teacher and paraprofessional contracts and following the FY20-21 budget year where the schools received a 0.55% budget increase compared to the +4.6% sought), we fully supported not only establishing the vital position of Director of SEL and Equity, but advocated that the position be established as a full time, and not a part-time position to advance the compelling needs of our students regarding SEL and Equity work. With respect to School Committee's role in establishing policy, during my first year on School Committee, while serving on the Policy Subcommittee, in February 2020, I identified that we lacked a Gender Identity Support policy. I drafted and advocated within the Policy Subcommittee that we adopt JBD Gender Identify Support which became HPS policy in July 2020. School Committee evaluates and hires the Superintendent. I served on the four member screening committee for Superintendent in May/June 2020 and as a School Committee representative in the screening interviews for the Assistant Superintendent

position and advocated to include questions regarding equity, diversity and inclusion work within our hiring questions for each candidate.

What do you need to learn in order to build your capacity to lead Holliston towards this change?

I have a lot to learn. During my first three years on School Committee I have learned process and procedure - how to get things done and how to build consensus to advance priorities. Last year, I worked with another partner within my law firm to establish a firm DEI Committee and develop action items regarding DEI professional development, recruitment, mentoring and retention. Within this work, I continue to learn how best to communicate initiatives and build support for change. As a School Committee member, I must learn to improve our communication on DEI work and push for a timeline (short and long term) tangible action items and an analysis of efficacy - what are the specific action items to advance goals, what is the timeline and what is the metric for success.

Jen Peterson, Candidate for School Committee

What are the characteristics of an equitable and accessible community?

An equitable and accessible community is one that offers social, physical and mental well-being to all its residents, and focuses on the key components of accessibility, affordability, stability, diversity, and safety. (www.getthehealthysmc.org)

What policy and practice changes would you propose for Holliston to become an equitable and accessible community?

There are two areas where we need to focus our attention: equity in housing; and equity in early-intervention services provided at the primary level. This week at Town Meeting an article passed that starts the process for seniors to maintain their residence. We need a Homestead Act in Holliston, that allows families to remain in their generational homes. In addition, the benefits of early intervention have been proven in research study after research study (<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-early-childhood-program-effectiveness/>). We need to provide our students with comprehensive services in the primary grades. Meeting every student at their level will further benefit our community and strengthen our school system.

Given the leadership role you are seeking, what is your part in this change?

As a member of the School Committee, I will seek to ensure that students' needs are met in the primary grades. In order to do this, it is necessary that teachers are provided with current best pedagogical practices for tier one intervention. I will seek to ensure Holliston Public Schools meet every student where they are and give them the tools to succeed early. Early intervention is the key! (<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ppe/professional-education-early-childhood-programs>)

It is also critical that the town boards and committees work together. I will actively participate in the Envisioning Future Holliston strategic plan, studying the multi-faceted socio-economic issues facing Holliston, specifically how we can meet the needs of all of our residents and allow them to stay in their homes.

What do you need to learn in order to build your capacity to lead Holliston towards this change?

First, I need to embark on the very steep learning curve of being on the School Committee! I will increase my understanding of the intricacies of town government, the by-laws, and the best way to affect change that will benefit Holliston for generations to come. Second, I will increase my understanding of the demographics of Holliston and how it is changing and growing. I will work with Parks & Rec, SEPAC, Diverse Holliston, and others, to create spaces and opportunities. Comprehensive surveys, outlining what options we can realistically present, need to be sent to all residents so they have agency.

SELECTBOARD

Tina Hein, Candidate for Selectboard

What are the characteristics of an equitable and accessible community?

The ability to attract and welcome a diversity of voices and experiences among those who live and work in Holliston defines an equitable and accessible community. Diversity is present in our community. And I have a responsibility to ensure that those individuals who have not historically had a strong voice in municipal government are provided greater opportunities to participate in decisions impacting Holliston. One way to accomplish this is to create an environment where the door is open to individuals who are looking to develop leadership skills, rather than being receptive only to those who already possess these skills. It is in these ways that Holliston becomes an example of an equitable and accessible community.

What policy and practice changes would you propose for Holliston to become an equitable and accessible community?

Building effective communication with residents through a variety of approaches, to share information on critical Town meetings and decisions, leads to a more accessible community. The Select Board frequently holds public forums to gauge resident opinions on a wide range of projects and initiatives. Most recently, the newly hired Assistant Town Administrator developed a quarterly newsletter to share events, plans and issues in the town. The Town has a growing presence on social media. And as a member of the Select Board, I regularly post information on upcoming meetings, recent votes, and other topics of interest to residents. I support the Envisioning Future Holliston Committee's use of surveys to gather feedback from residents on a wide range of issues.

I continue to advocate for policies and plans that address chronic transportation issues around congestion and limited access to the community. In Holliston, not everyone has a car, can operate a car, or wants to drive a car. People who travel or commute in Holliston on bike, foot or by public transit are among the most vulnerable in terms of safety when moving about the community. Chronic transportation issues limit the opportunities to live, play, and work in Holliston for all residents but particularly the most vulnerable among us. Transportation is an equity issue and it is a large part of the reason why I continue to participate in the Safe Routes to School partnership and work through the Select Board to advance Complete Streets projects.

Given the leadership role you are seeking, what is your part in this change?

As a member of the Select Board I look to participate in a variety of events that build community. I work hard to understand the needs of all residents by being consistently responsive to those who reach out with questions or concerns, comments, and ideas. The Select Board participates in hiring processes for several town departments. I have a role in ensuring that diverse candidates with a demonstrated interest in, knowledge of, or professional experience in diversity, equity and inclusion are brought forward for consideration. Holliston's new Assistant Town Administrator was hired from a pool of diverse candidates, in part because of her demonstrated experience in diversity, equity and inclusion. Often, policy determines the practice of inclusion. My role on a policy-setting board is to ensure that under-represented, vulnerable, or marginalized groups within our community are represented in policy discussions. By presenting the May and October warrants to Town Meeting, the Select Board has a significant role in spending decisions that direct tax-payer dollars to all areas of life in Holliston. Ensuring that I am available and responsive to resident concerns throughout the year means that the concerns of residents are brought forward in articles for Town Meeting. A recent example of this is the just passed article creating a stabilization fund to collect cannabis host community agreement impact fees that will now be available for a range of efforts that reduce the negative impacts of drug use in Holliston.

What do you need to learn in order to build your capacity to lead Holliston towards this change?

As a member of the Select Board, the extent of my known or unknown biases around a wide range of Town issues is always on full display. Humility and active listening skills are essential to serve the community effectively. I need to learn how to grow those skills and where to find the vulnerable voices that are not being heard. It is easier to have confidence in and act "strongly" on your beliefs and opinions than attend to that which is not immediately visible to you.

In June I will graduate from the Leadership MetroWest Academy. The time spent in the Academy has advanced my skills as a community leader. The Academy's focus on being anti-racist has expanded my understanding of the important work necessary to identify racism, and ways to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the MetroWest region. Through the Academy I have participated in transformative discussions with established leaders who have

experience in government, business, the economy, arts & culture, public safety, education, health & human services, municipal finance, transportation, and housing throughout the region. I joined the Academy Class of 2022 knowing that I would grow from the experience. I have confidence that I can translate these opportunities into real change for Holliston.