



Hamden Democratic Town Committee
Platform
January 26, 2020

January 15, 2021

Dear 2020-2022 Hamden Democratic Town Committee,

The Hamden DTC Issues Committee is proud to present The Hamden Democratic Town Committee Platform. We thank DTC members for providing your input to the platform via your response to our survey and suggested edits after reviewing the platform draft.

A review of the collaborative process used to develop our platform:

1. DTC Chair, Sean Grace, established the Issues Committee and invited any interested Hamden Democrats to join on March 10, 2020.
2. DTC Vice Chair, Elaine Dove, collected the names of interested members and appointed Lauren Garrett and Alexa Panayotakis as co-chairs of the Issues Committee.
3. The Issues Committee drafted a survey of municipal and state related topics to quantify opinions of the broader DTC regarding a range of issues.
4. The Issues Committee accepted survey responses from DTC members from mid-June to mid-August 2020.
5. Survey responses were reviewed to understand DTC priorities for the platform as well as our collective values.
6. We received 39 responses to the survey, indicating that DTC members prioritized policing, fiscal stability, education, transparency & accountability, environment, and economic development for inclusion in the platform.
7. The Issues Committee collaboratively drafted a platform based on the survey results and additional research.
8. A platform draft was sent to the DTC on December 18, 2020 for review and to make edit suggestions.
9. The Issues Committee reviewed and incorporated suggestions in producing the final draft.

The following DTC members contributed directly to the development of the platform:

Scott Beck, Kyle Blake, Elaine Dove, Megan Goslin, Nancy Hill, Shequerra Hobby, Diane Hoffman, Katie Kiely, Karimah Mickens-Weber, Brian Murphy, Alexa Panayotakis

Additionally, the following Hamden Democrats contributed to the development of the platform:

Danielle Chapman, Sarah Clark, Phil Cronan, Jay Forman, Lauren Garrett, Marissa Dionne Mead, Carmen Parker, Betsy Rosenblum, Deborah Smith

We envision this platform to be a contribution from our Democratic Town Committee to the Town of Hamden. Our platform reflects our commitment to Democratic values and principles. We expect that it will be a mechanism for vetting Democratic candidates for political office and holding Democrats accountable while in office.

This platform is a living document and should evolve as the most pressing issues in the town evolve. The current version concentrates on municipal issues. We expect the platform to grow to express our state vision and values as we prepare for state and national elections.

Yours in solidarity,
Lauren Garrett and
Alexa Panayotakis

Hamden Democratic Town Committee Platform

Mission Statement:

The mission of the Hamden Democratic Town Committee Platform is to help Democratic candidates and elected officials identify, express, and model the values we believe should be promoted to make Hamden an inclusive, equitable, and thriving community that is committed to ensuring the well-being and quality of life of all of its citizens. As Democrats, we believe in the worth and dignity of every human being. It is our responsibility to ensure that:

- All Hamden residents are treated equitably and given equal access to opportunities,
- We are all conscientious stewards of the environment,
- We are effective and transparent managers of town resources, and
- We work to make Hamden a desirable and affordable place for future generations.

Racism has been declared a public health crisis in Hamden.¹ Briefly, we understand racism to be a social system with multiple dimensions, including individual, interpersonal racism that is often internalized, and systemic racism that is institutional or structural in nature, and which structures opportunity and assigns value based on the social construction of race.

Democrats understand that systemic racism harms everyone in our community and that racism exists in all town systems and institutions. We expect elected Democrats to actively work to dismantle all aspects of structural racism across systems to ensure all neighborhoods and communities are seen, heard, and valued. Democrats believe that every community will thrive when barriers are eliminated. Each topic within the Hamden DTC platform includes a discussion of some of the impacts of systemic racism and ways that systems must be changed to promote equity.

When making determinations about candidates to endorse, the Hamden Democratic Town Committee seeks to match the qualifications and experiences of candidates with the varied responsibilities of running a large, diverse municipality and school district. Financial literacy and a willingness to learn about town finances are essential qualifications of all candidates seeking endorsement from the Democratic Town Committee. We understand that financial stability is a prerequisite for ensuring environmental justice, equitable education, and a community where our children will be proud to live.

The DTC Platform addresses the following essential issues for Hamden:

- Fiscal Stability
- Transparency and Accountability
- Education
- Policing
- Environment

¹ On July 20, 2020, The Hamden Legislative Council passed a resolution declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Emergency in the Town of Hamden.

- Housing

The following are aspirational vision statements, identified problems, and goals for the issues identified above. It is our expectation that DTC platform positions will guide candidates as they develop specific action plans and proposals during their candidacy and upon taking office.

The Hamden Democratic Town Committee Platform, ratified on January 26, 2021, is a living document. The Platform should be routinely revisited and it should evolve as the most pressing issues in Hamden change.

Fiscal Stability

Aspirational Statement:

Hamden Democrats believe that fiscal stability is essential for addressing the needs of our town. A financially secure town strives to maintain a healthy fund balance, a Town Pension Plan funded at 85%, balanced budgets, and a strong bond rating. These financial outcomes are achieved through honest borrowing for projects which are expected to be completed rather than used to balance the budget. Hamden Democrats will work to revitalize the Hamden economy and increase median household income. Hamden must be an affordable place to live and raise a family. We must stabilize and then lower the mill rate so community members can afford to stay in their homes.

Problem:

Currently, Hamden is facing multiple financial obstacles that limit our ability to move our Democratic goals forward. For example, our fund balance is expected to go negative this year and will be restored back up to \$0 by restructuring the town's debt. Borrowed funds have been used to balance budgets for years. Hamden's bond-rating is one step above junk status. The Town Pension Plan is currently funded at 39.9%. Dramatic increases in debt and liabilities from the underfunded pension plan and underfunded other post-employment benefits (OPEB) have resulted in over \$1.2 billion of liabilities. Our mill rate of 51.98 does not cover the cost of funding the town as it currently stands.

Solution:

Elected Democrats will work to make Hamden a more fiscally sustainable community through the following actions:

- Develop a 5-year plan with projections
- Develop a capital plan with priority rankings
- Develop a plan for cost reduction for non-essential services while protecting vulnerable populations and work with departments immediately to make adjustments rather than waiting for budget season
- Develop a plan for cost reduction through efficiency measures for essential services while protecting our most vulnerable community members
- Allow the Finance Director unrestricted communication with the Legislative Council, the fiscal authority of the town
- Hire a diverse staff and establish a plan for equitable hiring through civil service
- Renegotiate union contracts and contracts for services for cost reduction
- Balance budgets to stop the cycle of increased debt and liabilities
- Implement budget and hiring freezes
- Recruit an effective Economic Development Director to increase the grand list and reinvigorate Southern Hamden

- Apply disciplined debt reduction
- Apply for more grant funding for projects and hire a highly qualified grant writer
- Consistently evaluate budgetary constraints
- Utilize public input to evaluate the impact of financial decisions

Transparency and Accountability

Aspirational Statement:

Hamden Democrats will actively promote transparency and accountability in Town Government and the Hamden Board of Education. Transparency and accountability builds trust among citizens. Equitable access to information in as many formats as possible allows for more participation in government and a healthy democracy.

Problem:

The government in Hamden lacks transparency and accountability and does not provide adequate or equitable opportunities for oral public input. It falls on residents to actively search out and acquire the means to access government. Access is not available equally, which slants the power of some citizens over others. The town does not investigate concerns or take corrective actions transparently, causing residents to doubt the government can or will address their concerns. We need transparency at all levels, including the Mayor and their administration, finances, education, and policing.

Solution:

- All elected officials must commit to a transparency policy of using the website as an open source for data. Freedom of Information Act requests should be rare as the information should already be available.
- The town must provide honest, clear, and accessible communication regarding all aspects of the Government and Board of Education.
- Updates on meetings, recordings, and transcripts must be posted to the Town website and be provided in a format and timeframe that is easily accessible, and all in-person public meetings must be recorded and available on the website.
- Governmental information should be disseminated across all town platforms of communication, including the Town website, emails, Zoom meetings, social media, and press releases, with translations provided where needed.
- The town website should be used to its fullest capabilities by making the calendar more robust and sharing more information with the community in a consistent and intuitive manner.
- Government meetings should be accessible in person as well as on free and open online channels such as Zoom.
- Regardless of whether Hamden residents attend meetings via Zoom or in-person, written and oral public input must be allowed and encouraged to ensure more citizen participation.
- All elected officials are expected to actively participate in public meetings.
- Boards and commissions should meet regularly with consistent attendance, timely filled vacancies, and updated information on the town website. Background information should be posted to the website and agendas should be uniform. The administration should give guidance and rely on the expertise of commissioners.

- All accounts payable should be open to the public on the website and updated daily, similar to the State of CT's OPEN CHECKBOOK.
- IT services must be robust and able to allow reliable and direct communication between residents and Town officials (either elected or employees).
- The town website must be updated consistently with the current contact information of elected officials and government employees, and a language translation link needs to be made available.
- Contact information for the Webmaster should be displayed on the Hamden homepage.
- Contact information for the FOIA compliance officer should be displayed with procedures for requesting documents.
- More opportunities should be taken to teach residents how to navigate systems, (i.e., how to navigate the website; explaining that all town emails end in .com while all BOE emails end in .org).
- Greater transparency during legislative council meetings should be provided by ensuring follow-up on requests raised by councilmembers and allowing for a robust Q&A between council members and department heads so that constituents can see their council representatives representing them and their concerns.
- Increased hours and availability at Town Clerk's and Registrar's Offices during election time and the window for petitioning.

Education

Aspirational Statement:

Hamden Democrats believe that equitable access to education is a fundamental right of all children. We expect Hamden Public School (HPS) administration, elected officials, educators, and families to collaborate to create an optimal learning environment that allows all students to reach their potential. Achieving this learning environment requires active, open, and bi-directional communication with the Board of Education, with public input seen as essential for reaching key decisions. Hamden Democrats view equitable access to education in Hamden as one critical component of dismantling systemic racism and discrimination against students with disabilities.

Problem:

Although communities love their schools and HPS educators are deeply committed to their students, there are multiple opportunities for dismantling systemic racism and improving equitable access to education for all Hamden students. HPS elementary schools are racially segregated. Black and brown students and those with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by exclusionary discipline practices. As a group, HPS educators do not reflect the diversity of the student population. The HPS curriculum is not universally culturally responsive. Opportunity gaps interfere with students achieving grade level, particularly for black, brown, ELL, students receiving free and reduced lunch, and special education students. School-based mental health providers have little time for direct student intervention due to other demands. COVID-19 has the potential to exacerbate these negative impacts with potentially long lasting, far reaching effects.

Solution:

Elected Democrats will work to increase equitable access to a high-quality education for all Hamden students by:

- Enhancing opportunities for communication between families, BOE, HPS administration, and HPS educators regarding educational policy.
- Working to bring racial balance to HPS elementary schools.
- Incorporating a culturally responsive, anti-racist curriculum at all levels of education, with appropriate and ongoing professional development opportunities for educators.
- Increasing diversity of educators as a group.
- Reconsidering exclusionary discipline approaches and investing in alternate approaches (e.g., SEL infused throughout all levels of education; investing in school-based mental health professionals and reallocating tasks which limit their direct student contact time; investing in trauma-informed educational practices; providing positive behavioral

supports and utilizing restorative justice models; reconsidering the role of School Resource Officers).

- Making data about exclusionary discipline publicly available on a yearly basis, including how discipline is experienced by black and brown students and those with disabilities.
- Making data about student achievement publicly available on a yearly basis, including achievement levels of traditionally underserved students.
- Striving for transparency and public input regarding all HPS policies.
- Seeking opportunities to Incorporate universal access to pre-kindergarten.
- Create a pathway for our Hamden High School students by providing resources, job training and increasing access for Hamden's public service careers.
- Addressing the needs of students, families, educators facing adversity and trauma, for example related to the effects of COVID-19.

Policing

Aspirational Statement:

All members of our community deserve to be safe, respected, and equitably served by law enforcement. Our town government must seek equal and restorative justice measures for our black communities. Elected officials must demand accountability, transparency, and the elimination of systematic racism in the Police Department. We recognize that healthy police officers will be more capable of serving our community equitably.

Problem:

Hamden has a history of over-policing Southern Hamden and police violence in our black neighborhoods. Hamden's inactive police commission has not been transparent and it has failed to demand accountability from the police department. Hamden has neglected the health and well being of police officers to the detriment of officers' interactions with the community.

Solution:

Elected Democrats will work to dismantle systemic racism within the police department and promote a safe community and healthy environment in the following ways:

- Support hiring practices that produce a police department that reflects the community it serves
- Provide police response that addresses the diverse needs of the community
- Reimagine policing approaches by employing de-escalation, demilitarization, implicit bias training, and peer accountability
- Develop unarmed response options for non-violent incidents
- Reinvest funds into partnerships with social workers, mental health workers, and substance abuse counselors
- Train firefighters, EMTs, and police officers in developmentally and trauma-informed responses
- Support separating the Police Commission into two distinct Commissions: Police and Traffic. Support an active police commission that holds regular meetings which are accessible electronically, with minutes available in a timely manner
- The police commission will hold the police department accountable individually, systemically, and financially
- Transition to a civilian review board with subpoena power
- Increase systemic and financial support for police officers' health and well-being

Environment

Aspirational Statement:

Democratic candidates will actively support efforts to combat the climate crisis and seek environmental justice and equity, especially in Southern Hamden. These efforts will reduce the negative impacts on residents' health which affects their educational and employment opportunities and impacts the town economy. These initiatives are essential and will improve the quality of life for all of our residents.

Problem:

Hamden does not pro-actively pursue environmentally sustainable actions. Environmental concerns and needed actions are consistently put on the back burner. The effects of environmental consequences of previously made economic decisions on our most vulnerable residents continue to be tolerated by the town. UI is a major threat to our street trees.

Solution:

Elected Democrats will work to make Hamden a more environmentally sustainable community by:

- Address systemic racism by determining the greatest environmental concerns/needs of our vulnerable communities and begin to systematically address these concerns.
- Demand that the State of CT (DEEP) require clean up by the Olin Corporation of the Olin Powder Farm, and Hamden should do so in cooperation with non profits and state agencies.
- Continue efforts to maintain and improve surface water quality and groundwater quality, especially in Southern Hamden, through low impact development and/or green infrastructure.
- Encourage remediation/rehabilitation of existing sites throughout the town before developing new areas in town.
- Work to get needed bus routes in Hamden to reduce pollution and provide needed transportation.
- Add street trees to Southern Hamden and green islands along the middle of Dixwell Ave, to reduce heat islands.
- Create community gardens and mini-parks throughout Hamden and designate existing public areas with large trees as Hamden parks for natural cooling.
- Support passage of the Tree Ordinance to establish legal responsibilities for the care and planting of trees.
- Appoint a responsible person/office to receive and respond to calls/emails regarding UI complaints/concerns/questions.
- Require Planning and Zoning to have an environmental statement for all agencies/industries that may have significant impacts on the environment. If a decision is

made to waive the filing of such a statement, a signed letter of explanation should become a part of the file for that project.

- Enforce and strengthen as needed anti-blight regulations to improve morale and the health and safety of the neighborhoods where these locations exist.
- Re-open conversation on Community Choice Aggregation with public information meetings and bring before the Hamden Legislative Council. Clean, alternative sources of energy are critical to our resiliency.
- Work with utilities and town experts, including the Energy Use and Climate Change Commission, to determine the most impactful locations to install wires underground and develop solar farms
- Increase the miles per gallon of town vehicles and add electric vehicles to our fleet
- Promote bike lanes and walkable city initiatives.
- Promote environmental and climate change education including recycling, and composting.

Housing Equity

Aspirational Statement:

Hamden Democrats believe that all individuals should have fair and equitable choice in housing opportunities. Elected Democrats will consider more sustainable and thoughtful development. Democrats must work to reverse the legacy of zoning and other practices that have resulted in segregated neighborhoods in our town. Regardless of where you live and if you are a tenant or homeowner you have the right to a safe living environment. Everyone benefits from integrated neighborhoods.

Problem:

More than a century of racist, unconstitutional federal law and local policies have resulted in segregated neighborhoods. This has contributed to disproportionate wealth accumulation over generations for white families at the expense of non-white families. Segregated neighborhoods contribute to disparities in healthcare, education, opportunity, exposure to industries contributing to chronic disease (e.g., asthma), heat islands, over-policing of black neighborhoods, and more. Housing, banking, and other policies and laws are prohibitive of positive community development.

Solution:

Democrats will work to integrate our neighborhoods through:

- Change to local zoning laws to increase access to mostly white neighborhoods, including allowing accessory housing units, mixed-use buildings, conversion to duplex, and multifamily affordable housing.
- Lobby state and federal legislators to subsidize property taxes in cooperation with HUD
- Remove coded language (e.g., “preserve the character of a neighborhood”) and push back against misconceptions that progress in zoning and other policies would undermine neighborhood desirability.
- Promote equitable zoning laws to strengthen neighborhoods.
- Increase the accessibility of neighborhoods across the lifespan from young adults to seniors.
- Protect residents from the negative impact of COVID-19 on housing
- Equitably provide and promote education about available resources (e.g., emergency rental relief, oil assistance, and home repairs) and support for citizens, particularly those impacted by hardships.
- Update and enforce building and fire codes to keep tenants safe.