

Good afternoon, friends and neighbors, members of the Board of Selectmen and other town boards and commissions, Attorney General Tong [and distinguished guests].

Thank you for being here, particularly our Town staff who serve our Town daily, and all those who volunteer to serve this community and their families, and provide the support that makes our public service possible.

I want to begin by expressing my gratitude to every resident who participated in our recent election. Nearly 4000 of our neighbors cast a ballot - more than in any recent elections - and the result was very close.

I feel that a close election like this tells us that, while we all share a deep love for this town, we do not all experience its challenges **or think about its future** in the same way. Many residents are asking thoughtful questions about where Woodbridge is headed.

Those I have spoken with agree that growth for our Town is essential but may feel differently about what would work best for Woodbridge. Where we should grow, and how we balance the needs and desires to maintain what we have today with our obligations to tomorrow.

I believe that we must strike a balance between nature, community, responsibility, and opportunity; and that achieving and preserving that balance is our shared goal.

I also believe that as a community we must be honest with ourselves. Maintaining the services our residents value – our excellent schools, public safety, infrastructure, and support for our seniors - requires a stable and growing tax base. Costs are rising. And the status quo, if left unexamined, can quickly erode the very qualities we seek to protect.

The fundamental challenge we must navigate together is **how to retain what we value while ensuring our Town grows productively and remains strong.**

Over the past two years, we have accomplished a great deal. We advanced long-term planning for the former Country Club property. We have secured much needed investment in the future of our business district, strengthened our town operations, and laid the groundwork for addressing the needs of Beecher Road School. We made these efforts to establish a foundation for growth, but it's not about growth for its own sake. It is also about us **choosing where, how, and why** change happens, rather than reacting to it piece meal.

Over my next term, I will focus our efforts on an agenda centering on five key priorities:

First: protect our natural assets while planning for responsible growth.

Our town can preserve green space and still plan for the future. In fact, the best way to preserve what matters is to be proactive about where growth best fits.

This means minimizing reactive, proposal-by-proposal debates and moving to a **clear town strategy**, so residents aren't forced to evaluate every new idea in a vacuum.

It means true collaboration to define and balance our priorities and what we value with objective and genuine consideration for what our community needs and legislation dictates.

It means being creative with options and making the most of the once-in-a-generation opportunity we have with a major town asset like the CCW.

Most importantly, it means replacing fear with facts and leveraging the long-range planning work already done or underway. This will help us **choose** outcomes, rather than simply responding to them.

Second: strengthen, enhance, and expand opportunity in our business district.

A strong Woodbridge needs a strong center of gravity: a vibrant business district with safer walking connections and a plan that more effectively introduces mixed-use opportunities that support existing small businesses and will attract new ones.

When our business district thrives, the entire town benefits: more services closer to home, more local jobs, and a broader tax base that helps protect homeowners.

Third: address taxes directly and compassionately.

We cannot rewind the extreme changes in our real estate market. But we can continue to improve how we respond to its impact, especially for residents most vulnerable to sudden increases.

This term, I will push for a clear, practical set of actions including:

- **Better outreach and plain-language information** so residents understand what's happening and what tax relief programs exist; and
- **Strengthening those relief programs** for seniors, residents with disabilities, and veterans where it is feasible.
- **Working with our State legislators** on State options broader for local tax relief

Fourth: protect the excellence in education we value by planning for Beecher Road School's future.

Everyone in this town understands that our schools are not just a budget line item. Our schools are part of Woodbridge's identity and stability. Indeed, it is why many, if not most, of us moved here.

That's why we must approach Beecher's facility and infrastructure needs with seriousness, transparency, and a commitment to facts so the community can evaluate options clearly, understand costs honestly, and choose a path that protects educational quality while respecting taxpayer capacity.

Fifth: deliver town services efficiently, with respect for both taxpayers and staff.

Residents expect a town government that is responsive, professional, and fiscally disciplined. That means continuously looking at how we organize departments, coordinate services, and reduce duplication without undermining the people who do the work every day.

To achieve these goals, I will work to lower the temperature and raise the standard.

In the weeks ahead, I will launch structured opportunities for dialogue - spaces where our residents can be heard, questions can be answered, and disagreements can be explored productively and with mutual respect. And I will ask all of us - elected and appointed officials and members of the public - to recommit to three fundamental principles:

We can be passionate without being personal.

We can be rigorous without being unreasonable.

We can disagree without being disagreeable.

This entails recognizing that we must work together and that preserving what we love about Woodbridge will sometimes require us to adapt, not retreat. To plan so that our children can afford to stay or come back, our seniors can age in place, and our schools remain a source of pride. And it means communicating and accepting what our town can and cannot control.

None of this work can be done alone. It requires partnership with our volunteer Boards and Commissions, town staff, and most importantly, with you, our residents.

Our future will not be defined by one issue, one project, or one policy choice. It will be defined by how we treat one another, how carefully we plan, and how willing we are to balance tradition with responsibility.

I am grateful for the opportunity to continue this work. I am mindful of the trust it represents. And **I am optimistic** – I am very optimistic because I've gotten to know this town, and I know and believe in the strength of the people who call it home.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for caring about Woodbridge. And thank you for allowing me to continue to serve.