

## **2021 League of Women Voter’s Guide to Candidates — PART TWO: BOARDS OF EDUCATION, FINANCE**

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**Categories :** [Education](#), [Government & Politics](#)

**Tagged as :** [Board of Education Election 2021](#), [Board of Finance Election 2021](#), [Darien Elections 2021](#), [Darien League of Women Voters 2021](#)

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*Compiled each year as a public service by the [League of Women Voters of Darien](#).*

This Voters’ Guide is designed to provide information about the candidates to the public in a nonpartisan and balanced way to assist them in casting an informed vote on Election Day.

Questionnaires were submitted to candidates for local offices, asking one or more office related questions. Responses were limited to a specific word count and are printed exactly as submitted by the candidates. For every ballot position, a voter may write in the name of someone who is not listed as a candidate on a separate line at the bottom of the ballot for “Write-In Votes.”

In the State of Connecticut for those votes to be counted, the individual whose name is being written in, must have registered with the Secretary of State. Write-in candidates for the RTM must register with the Town Clerk no later than the last business day preceding the election.

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—[PART I: First Selectman, Board of Selectmen](#)

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[The League of Women Voters](#) (LWV) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that encourages the informed

and active participation of all citizens in the process of government. The LWV of Darien is a local group of both men and women who strive to improve the quality of democracy by increasing voters' knowledge of candidates and issues.

*Vote Tuesday, Nov. 2 — Democracy is not a spectator sport!*

(\*) Signifies that the candidate is an **incumbent**.

## **Board of Education**

Vote for up to Two

11/02/2021 – 11/05/2024

Questions: 250 words in total

- 1. What motivated you to be a candidate for the Board of Education and what special skills do you bring to this position?**
- 2. How can the district make up for lost instructional time and ensure equitable opportunities for all students now and in the period after the pandemic?**

**Julie Best, Democratic Party**

38 Red Rose Circle

1. We have great schools in Darien but they can be better. I have been volunteering in school-related positions for ten years. I know where we are succeeding and where we are not. As a PTO and Council of Darien School Parents chair, I have worked closely with parents, district Administration and members of the BoE to untangle problems and find ways through them together. Most recently, I helped the town's PTOs navigate the pandemic by bringing community and connection to families during these challenging times. These challenges are not yet over. By listening actively and advocating effectively I can continue to bring people together to work in the best interests of our children and our schools. I have a proven track record of collaboration and I look forward to having a greater impact at the Board table.

2. The pandemic moved the goalposts. Yes, Darien's students lost instructional time, but globally students lost instructional time. Thankfully, Darien had more in-person school last year than much of the nation. Yet there are sure to be deficits, and I understand staff are currently conducting assessments to determine curriculum adjustments.

Most importantly, I believe the district should focus on social emotional needs and the most foundational losses, such as reading, writing and socialization for our younger students. As a BoE member, I would help

ensure resources are being directed effectively to meet these needs, and I would advocate for ongoing communication between school and home on the solutions for now and the future.

**Stacey J. Tie, Democratic Party**

10 Clocks Lane

1. The moral responsibility of the Board of Education is to give Administration and staff the tools to create knowledgeable, inquisitive and empathetic students so that they are properly prepared to join a fast and ever-changing future. I've been watching Board of Education meetings for seven years, and lately they seem to have veered from this mission. Political motivation and personal agendas have overtaken moral imperative. Instead, the board should be focusing on early intervention, innovation, inclusion, differentiation, various student success outcomes, whole child development, and academic excellence in a way that is fiscally responsible. Through my work as a child advocate and on the RTM Finance and Budget committee, I have the experience needed to accomplish just that.

2. I would focus on social-emotional learning and social skill development as both impact mental health which affects a child's ability to learn; smaller class sizes so students get more attention day in and day out; and smaller caseloads for specialists - particularly speech and language pathologists who are instrumental in the building blocks of literacy and social skills. The district is already working to remediate lost instructional time by assessing students and adjusting curriculum, adding a psychologist at DHS and adding a literacy specialist at the elementary schools. As a board member, it would be my responsibility to both support the district in the actions they have already taken, as well as bring new solutions to the table.

**\*David Brown, Republican Party**

15 Revere Road

1. I am motivated to serve again because I know how important this team will be in setting the direction our schools will take in the coming years, and I want to have a voice at the table.

Due to COVID, our students are faced with an academic and emotional recovery effort that will require a great deal of support and focus by teachers and staff. I will ensure our administration prioritizes that effort and is held accountable to parents.

Recent discussions about curriculum and oversight have also illuminated how important the Board's role is in ensuring transparency and setting educational priorities for our children. I am committed to delivering an academically robust, agenda-free education in Darien, and ask for your support on Nov. 2.

2. Students will need a focused, individualized approach to their academic and emotional recovery. Each child experienced COVID differently, and will therefore need assistance in different ways.

I am committed to ensuring the district has the resources it needs to support all students in that effort, and to guiding the administration in prioritizing that personal recovery over other agendas that are competing today for attention and time spent in the classroom.

**Tara A. Wurm, Republican Party**

17 Mystic Lane

1. I was inspired to run to help navigate the challenges that have arisen due to COVID and the social unrest we've experienced in the last eighteen months.

As a former financial professional, I look forward to participating in the budget process with an eye toward fiscal discipline, transparency, and accountability as well as investing intelligently in our students. As a candidate for a Masters degree in Clinical Mental Health counseling, I am also highly focused on ensuring our students have the emotional support they need to succeed.

As a parent and longtime student advocate in the school system, I look forward to lending my voice at the board table in support of critical thinking skills, diversity of thought and retention of local decision-making. Political ideology has no place in the classroom, and I am passionate about providing our children with a robust, agenda-free education.

2. Every child has been affected differently by the pandemic, there has never been a more important time to individualize education. Balancing systemic data collection with an individualized approach to remediation will be key.

I believe channels of communication between parents, teachers and administration must be open. Parents and teachers should be communicating what they are seeing at home and in school and teachers need support from administration in garnering the resources they need.

Working together with an open dialogue between all stakeholders with singular focus on advancement of the student, I believe every child can reach their potential and recover from this difficult time.

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*The Board of Education candidates appear for their Darien League of Women Voters debate at time stamp 1:35 in this video. Their debate lasts for about 50 minutes:*

[LWV Candidates Night 10-5-21](#) from [Darien TV79](#) on [Vimeo](#).

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## **BOARD OF FINANCE**

### **Vote for up to Three**

11/08/2021 – 11/10/2025

Questions: [Answers may be no more than 250 words in total.]

#### **1. What information do you consider when evaluating capital requests?**

#### **2. Given today's low interest rates environment, should we consider bonding for items other than capital requests? If so, provide examples.**

**David R. Martin, Democratic Party**

15 Libby Lane

1. • Description of the capital item/project requested
- Purpose for the request/need fulfilled/goal of project
- Anticipated life of the capital project
- Total capital cost, amount requested in the current year and any subsequent year
- Description of how cost estimate was developed
- Expected start and completion dates
- Review of alternative methods/options to solve the need
- Benefit of the project
- Does it fulfill compliance with State statutes or other legal requirements
- What impact will the project have on the operating budget? Maintenance cost, reduced cost due to benefits etc.

Ideally each the BOS [Board of Selectmen] and BOE [Board of Education] will provide a five year forward look at potential capital needs with each of the projects ranked on a 1-3 priority basis. The BOS and BOE should use the same methodology for these forecasts. This would allow the BOF [Board of Finance] to consolidate the forward estimates by year and priority status which would allow the BOF to anticipate large

capital request years for the consolidated town.

2. Bonding is only appropriate for long lived projects or purchases. Capital markets theory holds that the duration of the funding should closely match the useful life of that being funded. Bonds are typically issued for periods of 15 years or longer so only projects or purchases with long useful lives should be considered.

**\*Robert Cardone, Republican Party**

17 Park Lane

1. Many different criteria can be used to evaluate a capital request. Among those are: What is the timeline for the future need of the capital item? Is the request short term or long term? Are there large operating costs associated with the capital request that will need to be budgeted for in future years? Is there any way to share the costs with other towns or private companies? Can the capital project be bonded so that costs are spread over a long-term timeline? I view capital requests as having gone through an approval process that touches all levels of town government and then ultimately approved / disapproved by the Representative Town Meeting (RTM). So, in practice, everyone approves the capital request, not just the BOF [Board of Finance].

2. Most rating agencies do not take kindly to using bonding to finance a town's operating costs. Taxes collected by the town should be enough to cover the operating costs of the town. Bonding is usually used for long term capital projects.

**John O. Wolcott, Republican Party**

1 Nolen Lane

Thanks to LWV for their thoughtful queries. A first-time candidate for the Board of Finance would not unreasonably have many, many more questions than answers. As a result, the following is substantially based on a career in corporate finance

1. Information to consider when evaluating capital improvements might include: how an acquisition would impact the Town's long-term capital plan; is the asset truly necessary or "nice to have"; does the expenditure extend useful life and/or substantively add value; could the expenditure be deferred; what competing needs for capital exist; is there another underutilized asset available that could satisfy the need; could the acquisition be combined with or divided into component parts; have cost/benefit analyses, including social, environmental, educational, safety and opportunity costs been thought through; are charges to deliver, install, operate, maintain and dispose of the asset taken into account; are warranty terms favorable; were comparable competitive bids sought; are bids fixed price or cost plus; are incentives/penalties negotiated; does the final draft of the purchase contract (and the asset itself) conform in its entirety to agreed terms; if not to be in service for its entire useful life, could the asset be leased; in that cost of capital is part-and-parcel of an acquisition, how will the necessary funds be sourced; will the vendor finance advantageously; and so on.

2. Finally, with respect to bonding, one might not have thought that either the Town would choose, or its underwriters support, entering the business of financial engineering.

**\*Paul B. Hendrickson, Republican Party**

97 Hoyt St.

1. There are many criteria to use when evaluating capital requests: health and safety, how many townspeople does it affect, what is the immediacy, length of project, potential for State and/or Federal assistance, adequacy and number of potential vendors (references), value of project / capital purchase to the entire Town. Capital requests typically originated either with the Board of Selectmen or the Board of Education and they provide substantiating information for their request(s). The request is reviewed by the Board of Finance and ultimately approved / disapproved by the Representative Town Meeting (RTM).

2. Bonding is typically associated with long-term capital projects or assets and the rating agencies frown upon using borrowing (bonding) to meet operating expenses.